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Tennyson and After

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PhD Thesis

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## Abstract

This thesis is a study of the posthumous literary reception and reputation of Alfred Tennyson, from the year of his death, 1892, to 1950. Its focus is on allusions to Tennyson's work in poetry, fiction and drama, but it also takes works of criticism and journalism into account, as well as other evidence of Tennyson's continuing readership in the period.

The thesis approaches the period by decades, involving in-depth assessments of Tennyson's influence on the work of writers as diverse as Conrad, Housman, Austin, Forster, Bennett, Owen, Sassoon, Lawrence, T. S. Eliot, Joyce, Woolf, Pound, Auden, Evelyn Waugh, and Graham Greene. Their various responses – from the appreciative to the scornful, the ambivalent to the oedipal – are put into context using works of criticism which discuss Tennyson, by both canonical writers such as A. C. Bradley and F. R. Leavis as well as less famous critics. The thesis calls into question Bradley's idea of a 'reaction against Tennyson' having already reached its peak by 1917. I will show that, in reality, Tennyson's influence and popularity endured long into the twentieth century, and that the aftermath of the Great War meant that the poet's work was truly at its nadir of popularity in the late 1920s and 1930s. The thesis will also address Tennyson's ultimate resurgence in popularity in the 1940s, partly as a result of the impact of World War II but partly as the writers who had seemed radical earlier in the century (not least T. S. Eliot) felt more comfortable about accepting their influences. The thesis ends by placing this in the context of the wider revival of interest in Victorian literature and culture in the 1940s and early 1950s

The appendix of the thesis is a database of Tennyson's poems which appeared in anthologies in the period.

## Acknowledgments

The genesis of the ideas behind this thesis began when I was working on my MA dissertation at King's College London in 2003, under the supervision of Leonée Ormond. I had decided to investigate the posthumous creation of a poetic identity for Keats, through poems like Shelley's *Adonais* and works of biography and criticism, before his work was widely available to the general public (he died in 1821 and his work were only accessible to the wide reading public after 1848). The inspiration to work on Tennyson arose partly from my study for this project of the Cambridge 'Apostles' and their taste in poetry in the early 1830s, but also as a result of being taught Tennyson as an undergraduate by Peter D. McDonald, and reading the introduction to his book *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice, 1880-1914*. I am extremely grateful to my supervisor, Philip Horne, for all the support and advice he has provided throughout the research and writing of this thesis, as well as my secondary supervisor Rosemary Ashton. The UCL Department has proven a stimulating and friendly place to study, and I am also grateful for the input provided by Danny Karlin, Hugh Stevens, Charlotte Mitchell, Henry Woudhuysen, Helen Hackett, Peter Swaab, Rachel Bowlby and Jane Lewty, as well as the support of Anita Garfoot and Kathryn Metzenthin. The advice, support and friendship of the graduate community at UCL has also been essential and special thanks must go to Oliver Herford, Miranda el-Rayess, David Gooblar, Ruth Maxey and Julia Jordan, as well as Anthony Cummins at Oxford University.

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Dark house, by which once more I stand  
Here in the long unlovely street,  
Doors, where my heart was used to beat  
So quickly, waiting for a hand,

A hand that can be clasped no more –  
Behold me, for I cannot sleep,  
And like a guilty thing I creep  
At earliest morning to the door.

He is not here; but far away  
The noise of life begins again,  
And ghastly through the drizzling rain  
On the bald street breaks the blank day.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Alfred Tennyson, *In Memoriam VII*, *The Poems of Tennyson* ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1969), pp. 870-871. Hereafter *The Poems of Tennyson*.

## Preface

Tennyson's poetry makes an appearance in the work of many other writers. This thesis sets out to consider how Tennyson shows up in many of the most important, and indeed many of the most popular novels and poems published from his death in 1892 to 1950.

Let us begin by charting some manifestations of a single phrase, 'Here in the long unlovely street', from *In Memoriam*. In Henry James's 1907 book of travel-reflections *The American Scene*, which details his return to the country of his birth, the author visits a Boston much changed since his youth, and finds vistas of bourgeois prosperity in the avenues of the 'New Land'.<sup>2</sup> It seems to James 'a community leading its life in the social sun.'<sup>3</sup>

Why, accordingly, of December afternoons, did the restless analyst, pausing at eastward-looking corners, find on his lips the vague refrain of Tennyson's "long unlovely street"? Why if Harley Street, if Wimpole, is unlovely, should Marlborough Street, Boston, be so – beyond the mere platitude of its motiveless name?<sup>4</sup>

James can understand the 'unloveliness' of Wimpole Street, with its 'monotony of black leasehold brick', but is puzzled to find himself with the 'vague refrain' on his

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<sup>2</sup> Henry James, *The American Scene* ed. W. H. Auden (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1946), p. 247.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, p. 248.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 247.

lips when in this new comfortable area of Boston.<sup>5</sup> A meditation of several pages is stimulated for James by the insidious question of why it is that 'Marlborough Street, for imperturbable reasons of its own, used periodically to break my heart.'<sup>6</sup> For the purposes of this thesis James's complex speculations about the reasons need not concern us here. What chiefly matters is that the 'character and depth' of Wimpole Street and Harley Street, epitomised by the poetry of Tennyson, are missing from the new Boston.<sup>7</sup>

This thesis sets out to ask why writers in the period 1892-1950 found on their lips refrains from Tennyson. Alice Meynell, who had written an article on Tennyson in 1910 describing the poet as 'the captain of our dreams', also found the 'dark house' lines on her lips in a poem about the beginning of the Great War.<sup>8</sup> In 'Summer in England, 1914', she wrote:

On London fell a clearer light;  
Caressing pencils of the sun  
Defined the distances, the white  
Houses, transfigured one by one,  
The 'long, unlovely street' impearled.  
Oh what a sky has walked the world!<sup>9</sup>

The influence of Tennyson is emphasised by the line 'Houses, transfigured one by one'; the pause after the first word seems an echo of 'Doors, where my hand

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 248.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Alice Meynell, 'Tennyson', *Dublin Review* 146 (January 1910), p. 71.

<sup>9</sup> Alice Meynell, *Poems on the War* ed. Clement Shorter (London: Privately Printed, 1915), p. 1.



was used to beat' in the verse from *In Memoriam*, which shares the same number of syllables per line with Meynell's poem. However, Meynell increases the number of syllables in the first word to two, and the phrase continues on from the previous line, the effort of allusion prioritised over the quality of the new verse, leaving it lacking in comparison to the earlier lines. Meynell's poem was written at the start of the Great War, without full awareness of the horrors to come, but she is conscious of the suffering inevitable in a conflict. The 'long, unlovely street' is so described in *In Memoriam* partly thanks to its austere appearance, but also because the narrator of the poem has been deprived of the contact he cherished with his dead friend; and although the street may appear more beautiful, as it is 'impearled', pearls have had a connection with death ever since *The Tempest*, where Ariel sings 'Full fathom five thy father lies, / Of his bones are coral made, / Those are pearls that were his eyes.'<sup>10</sup>

As this study will show, the Great War heralded by Meynell brought a significant challenge to Tennyson's reputation, and few critics were more vociferous than Virginia Woolf. She wrote a play, *Freshwater*, to be performed in private by her family and friends, set in the Victorian period in the area of the Isle of Wight where Tennyson lived, close to his friend Julia Margaret Cameron. In the play, the painter G. F. Watts arrives with his young, recently-married wife, the actress Ellen Terry. She is only 17, and at the end of the play decides to elope with John Craig, a young sailor she has met. The pair have decided to live in

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<sup>10</sup> *The Tempest*, Act I Scene II lines 399-401, *The Arden Shakespeare Complete Works* ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (London: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998), p.1076.

Bloomsbury, WC1, the lavatorial connotations of which shock the Freshwater residents. Tennyson alone recognises the postcode:

Hallam lived there. Wimpole Street, West Central, we called it in those more euphonious days. The long unlovely street. See *In Memoriam*.

CRAIG

What's Hallam? What's *In Memoriam*?

TENNYSON

What's Hallam? What's *In Memoriam*? It is time I went back to Farringford. Emily will be anxious.<sup>11</sup>

In Woolf's depiction, Tennyson cannot envisage a world in which the majority of people do not possess an in-depth knowledge of individual stanzas of *In Memoriam*. The audience Woolf was writing for – her family were direct descendants of Julia Prinsep, a favoured model of Julia Margaret Cameron – would all have been aware of *In Memoriam* and would almost certainly have recognised the quotation. Tennyson is being mocked here, although it is nonetheless clear that the audience (which included several avant-garde artists and writers) would have been familiar with his work. It was not only family connections which ensured continuing familiarity with the poet's work – the same lines also appear in a work of criticism by T. S. Eliot published in 1936. Eliot believed *In Memoriam* to be 'a diary of which we have to read every word' and he

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<sup>11</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Freshwater* (1935 version) ed. Lucio P. Ruotolo (London: Hogarth Press, 1976), p. 41. Hereafter *Freshwater*.

chose the 'dark house' section as something which gives him a 'shudder', expressive of 'a universal emotion in what could only be an English town.'<sup>12</sup>

As we will see, the attitudes of most of these writers toward Tennyson are nuanced, and change over time; what these examples show, at the very least, is the enduring presence of the poet's work in English literature and literary criticism many years after he died. This study will focus on the reception of Tennyson in the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first five decades of the twentieth century in order to gauge how his reputation changed over time. It will also provide an insight into the cultural debates ongoing at particular points in the period, in which Tennyson's work often played an important role. I believe that this will offer a comprehensive insight into the afterlife not only of Tennyson's work, but of the Victorian period as a whole. As Laurence Mazzeno has noted, 'no poet has ever or since been more closely associated with his times'; and Tennyson has been labelled 'the pre-eminent Victorian', by Joanna Richardson in the title of a 1962 biography.<sup>13</sup> The most sustained attempt to provide a study of this kind has been that of Mazzeno, in *Alfred Tennyson: the Critical Legacy*, published in 2004, but his work deals only with works of criticism; one of the key assumptions I am making in this work is that the responses to the poet by creative writers can be seen as more indicative of general attitudes toward the poet, and may well be more interesting in terms of literary history than those contained in works of pure criticism. This thesis deals with Tennyson's presence as it manifests itself in a variety of ways, ranging from allusion and echo to overt

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<sup>12</sup> T. S. Eliot, introduction to *The Poems of Tennyson* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1936), p. xv.

<sup>13</sup> Laurence Mazzeno, *Alfred Tennyson: The Critical Legacy* (New York: Camden House, 2004), p. 1. Hereafter Mazzeno; Joanna Richardson, *The Pre-Eminent Victorian* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962).

reference and critical and biographical discussion. As such I have not felt it was appropriate or helpful to go too far into the wide body of recent writing concerning the theory of allusion. What follows is an overview of the most important recent works on the subject.

## Chapter One

'How long will this posthumous life of mine last?'<sup>14</sup>

In investigating allusions to his poetry as well as the critical response to his work, this study is an academic examination of a practice which has been until fairly recently one of the least addressed concepts in English literary studies. Writers have always alluded to the work of their predecessors, and this has inspired recent critics – most notably Walter Jackson Bate, Harold Bloom, Christopher Ricks, and Robert Douglas-Fairhurst – to consider the practice in some depth. Bate's 1970 book, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet*, remains one of the key texts in the study of influence. Bate identifies the 'accumulating anxiety' that authors face – '*what is there left to do?*'<sup>15</sup> His focus is the eighteenth century, as in the neoclassical movement a variety of writers found that 'something still remained to be done'.<sup>16</sup> But Bate's book is also clearly inspired by his own experiences as a specialist in Romantic literature, writing in the twentieth century, and he makes a comment that is of direct relevance to this thesis. In what he calls early twentieth-century 'formalism', he observes:

the immense effort of the arts, including music, of the early and middle twentieth century to get the nineteenth century off their backs. So strenuous – at times single-minded – was the effort that,

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<sup>14</sup> John Keats's reported question to his doctor near the end of his life, quoted in an unsent letter by Joseph Severn, March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1821. Reprinted in *Bulletin of the Keats-Shelley Memorial I* (1910), p. 44.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Jackson Bate, *The Burden of the Past and the English Poet* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1971), p. 3. Hereafter *The Burden of the Past*.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

during the childhood and youth of those of us now middle-aged, many of us began to assume that the first requirement of the sophisticated poet, artist, or composer was to be as unlike his nineteenth-century predecessors as possible. We even had moments when we suspected that the principal influence on modern poetry, for example, was not so much the array of abstractions cited in the recondite search for aim or justification, but rather the poetry of Tennyson. What we are trying desperately to be unlike can tell a great deal about not only what we are doing but why, and a movement may often be better understood by what it concretely opposes than by its theoretical slogans.<sup>17</sup>

Bate unites himself with his readers, citing the example of literary influence in the early to mid-twentieth century as 'a subject we have [not] been much tempted to pursue,' despite its importance.<sup>18</sup> What this thesis will attempt to do is to analyse the situation outlined by Bate in greater detail, and show that it is not a mere coincidence that the poet he chooses as his main example is Tennyson. As I will demonstrate, his poetry was often 'concretely opposed' by emerging writers in the period 1892-1950, and yet it remained a significant influence, in a much more positive sense, on many of them, even as they were opposing it in their manifestos and works of criticism. Bate's identification of a 'leapfrog' in literary history<sup>19</sup> – where a writer professes to admire writers much earlier than his or her

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

own immediate poetic forebears – usually masks a much more interesting and nuanced relationship with those forebears.

Bate's description of the dilemma of '*what is there left to do*' as an 'anxiety' leads one to think of the title of a book published two years after that of Bate – Harold Bloom's *The Anxiety of Influence*, whose title is perhaps the most famous phrase concerning the concept of influence, and remains widely quoted – usually without citing Bloom's actual argument. Clearly influenced by Bate, he wanted to move away from the dominant practice in the study of 'Poetic Influence' which, as he saw it, involved 'the wearisome industry of source-hunting, of allusion-counting; an industry that will soon touch apocalypse anyway when it passes from scholars to computers.'<sup>20</sup> Bloom was also reacting against the 'more absurd myths (or gossip grown old) of literary pseudo-history', the 'critical absurdity which salutes each new generation of bards as being somehow closer to the common language of ordinary men than the last was.'<sup>21</sup>

In his effort to establish a new way of discussing influence, Bloom's elaborately Freudian theory is that 'Poetic history [...] is held to be indistinguishable from poetic influence, since strong poets make that history by misreading one another, so as to clear imaginative space for themselves.'<sup>22</sup> Bloom sees Satan in *Paradise Lost* as a typical post-Enlightenment poet, with God representing 'cultural history, the dead poets' – the poet as Satan cannot partake in 'the heroism of endurance' like Adam and the Son, and therefore 'becomes the hero as poet, finding what must suffice, while knowing that nothing

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<sup>20</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry*, (New York: OUP, 1973), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 69.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 5.



can suffice'.<sup>23</sup> The rebellion is, at root, a revolt against 'the consciousness of death's necessity', a stronger rebellion than those enacted by 'all other men and women'.<sup>24</sup> This derives from Freud's idea of the child desiring to become 'the father of himself', as Bloom believes that 'All quest-romances of the post-Enlightenment [...] are quests to re-beget one's own self, to become one's own Great Original'.<sup>25</sup> The poet-child is forced to struggle with his own poetical 'father' in order to fight the anxiety of potential poetic death. Bloom believes that this anxiety of influence is 'a variety of the uncanny', as both the fear of castration and the fear of ceasing to be a poet manifest themselves frequently as a visual problem.<sup>26</sup> Either the poet 'sees *too clearly* [...] or else his vision becomes veiled, and he sees all things through an estranging mist'.<sup>27</sup> One can see how much more psychoanalytical and polemical an approach this is than Bate's idea of 'the burden of the past' – Bloom's poet does not set out to negate the apparent influence of the recent past, but to overcome it through misreading.

Bloom believes that only 'strong poets, major figures with the persistence to wrestle with their strong precursors, even to the death' manage to engage fully with the influence of these precursors.<sup>28</sup> His list of such 'strong poets' is a select few – in the Victorian period, for example, only Tennyson and Browning qualify.<sup>29</sup> The process is one of 'misprision':<sup>30</sup> 'Poetic Influence – when it involves two strong, authentic poets, – always proceeds by a misreading of the prior poet, an

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>25</sup> Freud quoted by Bloom in *ibid.*, p. 64.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 78.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 77.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation.<sup>31</sup> As such, 'Every poem is a misinterpretation of a parent poem. A poem is not an overcoming of anxiety, but is that anxiety.'<sup>32</sup> For Bloom, 'the motto of English poetry since Milton was stated by Keats's "Life to him would be Death to me"'.<sup>33</sup>

Harold Bloom admitted in 1997 that the reception of his book 'remains ambivalent' and it is certainly the case that the central theory has been hotly disputed; but a coherent alternative has not been suggested until fairly recently.<sup>34</sup> *The Anxiety of Influence* has helped call into question a central idea of allusive theory – prior to its publication, the relationship between a younger poet and an earlier writer was a clearly-defined hierarchy, with the elder the sole agent. This questioning is fruitful, and yet Bloom's theory is problematic. A major difficulty is his use of the word 'strong'. While this functions, in terms of the theory, simply to denote the capability and willingness to engage in a misreading of a certain predecessor, it also calls into mind the idea of hierarchy. Bloom is a critic who has never been afraid of thinking in hierarchical terms – his book *The Western Canon*, for instance, spelt out his own idea of the great works of Western literature. The 'strong' poets Bloom identifies are undoubtedly canonical – the least famous is Wallace Stevens – and yet his idea of 'strength' can easily be read out of context to indicate a 'pecking order' of poets, where in reality for Bloom the judgement that a poet like Tennyson is 'stronger' than, say, Gerard Manley Hopkins, is based purely on the differing ways in which they engage with Keats.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 94.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Second Edition) (New York: OUP, 1997), p. xi.

This calls to mind another problem with Bloom's theory – the fact that it comprehensively ignores historical and biographical details. For example, the relationship between Tennyson and Keats is decided on as the most important to the former as an emerging poet. And yet the idea of poetical 'inheritance' presupposes an awareness by the younger poet of the work of the former. In reality Keats's work was barely known in his own lifetime, and the adolescent Tennyson's knowledge of the work of Keats is open to question. The poet whose work was revered, above all, by Tennyson's friends at Cambridge (the 'Apostles') was Shelley, the merits of whose work were debated at the Oxford Union by Tennyson's friends Hallam and Monckton Milnes in 1829. But for Bloom, Shelley is the poetical forefather of Browning, as expressed in *A Map of Misreading*, with Shelley the 'presence that the poem ['Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came'] labors to void.'<sup>35</sup> Browning's poetical forebear is indeed usually cited as Shelley, thanks to his illuminating discussion of the poet's work in the 'Essay on Shelley', but the frequent use of first-person narrators in Browning's poetry calls into question the existence of so easily definable a relationship of father and son; it could be argued that the difficulty of his work, alongside his frequent use of the dramatic monologue, asks as many questions of the Wordsworthian idea of a poet as 'man speaking to men', and indeed of the poetry of Shakespeare's dramatic soliloquies, as it does of Shelley's poetics.<sup>36</sup>

The idea of there being one poetic father for a younger poet to 'misrepresent' is thus deeply questionable. And what Bloom's argument also fails

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<sup>35</sup> Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (New York: OUP, 1975), p. 116.

<sup>36</sup> William Wordsworth, 'Preface', 1802 text, *Lyrical Ballads* ed. R. L. Brett & A. R. Jones (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 255.

to take into account – which, as this thesis will evince, is a central factor of reception history – is the cultural context of both the earlier and the later poem. As the work of Jerome McGann has shown, poems are not disseminated through history without any contextual background – the context of a piece (e.g. where it has been previously published, whether it is associated by the reader with a particular person or group of people, whether it is on a particular school syllabus) is enormously important. Although, as Douglas-Fairhurst has pointed out,<sup>37</sup> the amount of work required by McGann of a critic is near-impossible – they are asked to be aware of every single instance of publication of a poem – it is nonetheless true that a number of poets and novelists are afforded prominent roles in the work of a younger poet because of what they are perceived to stand for. This may also colour the reaction to an elder writer.

This lack of attention to historical context differentiates Bloom from Bate, whose book is consistently more closely engaged with such details, and it is linked to one of the main problems which Christopher Ricks, writing more recently, has identified with Bloom's approach. As Bloom's own example of Browning shows, he believes that one can identify the poet who is being wrestled with simply by virtue of reading the work of the younger poet. And yet, as Ricks points out in his 2002 book *Allusion to the Poets*, Bloom's own choice of the phrase 'post-Enlightenment' to describe the poets he has chosen as 'strong' is problematic, as in his book Bloom 'vaults from Milton to the Romantics, ignoring the work of Pope and Dryden and only briefly mentioning Gray.'<sup>38</sup> This

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<sup>37</sup> See Robert Douglas-Fairhurst, *Victorian Afterlives: The Shaping of Influence in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), pp. 66-7.

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets* (Oxford: OUP, 2002), p. 14.

immediately brings to mind Bloom's own precursor in writing on influence, Walter Jackson Bate, whose book focuses on exactly the area Bloom ignores. Ricks's idea of allusion is rather more accommodating than that of Bloom:

To allude to a predecessor is both to acknowledge, in piety, a previous achievement and also is a form of benign appropriation – what was so well said has now become part of my way of saying, and in advancing the claims of a predecessor (and rotating them so that they catch a new light) the poet is advancing his own claims, his own poetry, and even poetry. By an open recognition of the predicament of the poet as heir, and of the burden of the past, by embracing rather than merely failing to evade the predicament, the poet can be saved by allusion, by being an alert and independent dependent.<sup>39</sup>

Central to this is Ricks's idea that 'the alluder hopes that the reader will recognise something', in contrast, as he sees it, with the plagiarist who hopes that the reader will not.<sup>40</sup> The writer, as envisaged by Ricks, is rather more self-aware than he or she is in Bloom's book (the lack of female writers in Bloom's scheme is notable), and the practice of allusion is not one of 'creative misreading' but something with the potential for many different interpretations, as opposed to Bloom's narrow narrative of wrestling with the past.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

Recently the work of Robert Douglas-Fairhurst has explored allusion and influence in the Victorian period in a manner closer to that of Ricks than Bloom. In a detailed engagement with the latter, Douglas-Fairhurst concludes that the argument of *The Anxiety of Influence* is too narrow, as a result of his 'decision to adopt a theory of anxiety which is a curiously arrested version of Freud's thinking on the subject.'<sup>41</sup> Rather than poetical engagements with the 'mighty dead' being examples of 'wrestling', for Douglas-Fairhurst they are instances of poets 'conversing' with their forebears.<sup>42</sup> Although, as I have shown, Douglas-Fairhurst is wary of the implications of Jerome McGann's theory of readership, his idea of influence includes the implications of a variety of factors surrounding a work of literature. For Douglas-Fairhurst, the original context of a quotation carries into the new work in which it figures:

a quotation has hidden depths, but also hidden widths; it resonates  
in its new context, saved, but its outline is also pressed against,  
chastised, by what remains behind.<sup>43</sup>

My approach to allusion in this thesis, while not entirely discounting Bloom, will be primarily influenced by Ricks and Douglas-Fairhurst. Allusion is not always a positive act – it can just as easily be 'contemptuous', as Ricks calls a particular example of T. S. Eliot citing Tennyson, as it can be appreciative.<sup>44</sup> Where this thesis differs from the work of the critics discussed above is in its focus on one

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<sup>41</sup> *Victorian Afterlives*, p. 32.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Ricks, *T. S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 258.

particular author, and as alludee rather than alluder. This was inspired, in part, by Stephen Gill's 1998 book *Wordsworth and the Victorians*, in which Gill investigated the 'cultural significance' of Wordsworth in the Victorian period.<sup>45</sup> Gill's book is a noble undertaking which addresses many very interesting aspects of Wordsworth's reputation in the Victorian period, including both his influence on particular writers – Arnold, Tennyson, and Wordsworth most notably – and a more general sense of his fame and status as a 'spiritual power'.<sup>46</sup> Wordsworth was a more explicitly philosophical poet than Tennyson, and in his book Gill focuses on, among other things, the influence of the poet's ideas on George Eliot. While Gill is sensitive to allusion, his book dwells at greater length on the ideas in Wordsworth's poetry as well as his influence on culture in more general terms – *Wordsworth and the Victorians* ends with an account of the development of the Wordsworth Society into the National Trust.

The establishment of the Wordsworth Society took place in 1880, thirty years after the poet's death;<sup>47</sup> that of the Tennyson Society occurred over sixty years after his death, in 1960. The discrepancy in the amount of time taken for a group of admirers to establish a society celebrating the poet's work is testament to the much less easy transition of Tennyson to the position of a celebrated, established part of the English canon. As this thesis will show, there was a period in the twentieth century in which it seemed likely that Tennyson's work would never become truly canonical, its continuing presence in anthologies at odds with its apparently dwindling relevance to twentieth-century readers, as evinced by

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<sup>45</sup> Stephen Gill, *Wordsworth and the Victorians* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001), p. 3.

<sup>46</sup> Chapter heading from *ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 235.



the tiny number of book-length studies of his work published between 1923 and 1949. While Gill's book does examine Wordsworth's reputation when it was 'at the ebb' in the mid-1860s, when we look at the dates we can again discern the difference between the afterlives of the two poets.<sup>48</sup> The 'tide' turned in Wordsworth's favour in the 1870s and 1880s, as Gill notes, just twenty years after his death.<sup>49</sup> Twenty years after Tennyson's death, in 1912, his status as one of the pre-eminent English poets was only beginning to be called into question, and the practice of Tennysonian allusion only just starting to display traits of being anything other than admiring. Gill, in his introduction, says that 'a case could be made for pursuing [his] theme to the end of the Great War', as 'Wordsworth's virtue as a specifically *English* poet was fervently promoted', and indeed any study of a writer's twentieth-century afterlife has to take the impact of both World Wars into account.<sup>50</sup> The conflicts were of tremendous importance to the reputation of English poets in general, but in particular Tennyson. As this thesis will show, it was the association of Tennyson's work with the elderly, ruling classes in early twentieth-century Britain that was seen as so damaging in light of the Great War, and yet the outbreak of the Second World War was one of the main catalysts in his return to favour.

The studies I have outlined above range in their focus from the 'post-Enlightenment' to the Victorian period, but despite, for example, Harold Bloom's frequent citation of Wallace Stevens, and Ricks's interest in T. S. Eliot and Bob Dylan, they tend to focus on the practice of allusion by writers working before

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<sup>48</sup> John Campbell Shairp, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

1900. This thesis will attempt to approach allusion from a new angle: the study of allusion to a single writer and of that writer's influence on poets and writers in the fin de siècle and twentieth century. Although critics and biographers of, say, W. H. Auden often identify particular influences on the young poet, there are very few studies of individual writers and their literary afterlives in the twentieth century. While Tennyson is one of the most interesting examples, given his eminence and fame in the Victorian period, I hope that this study will lead to a wider interest in twentieth-century literary afterlives. One only need think of the punishment of Tony Last in Evelyn Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* – re-reading the complete works of Dickens for an eternity – to see the potential interest of a study of Dickens's influence on novelists and poets in the twentieth century (one is also reminded of the original title of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, which was a quotation from *Our Mutual Friend*, 'He do the Police in Different Voices').<sup>51</sup> A similar study of a less 'famous' writer, but one who was nonetheless regarded as one of the greatest poets of the Victorian period, Robert Browning, would also be of interest, especially in terms of the influence of his (and Tennyson's) dramatic monologues on the work of Ezra Pound, whose poetry initially seems so different from the work of the Victorians.

The appendix to this study – a database of Tennyson's appearances in anthologies in the period 1892-1950 – will go some way to redressing the balance between the attitudes towards the poet displayed by authors writing at particular moments in history, and the wider readership of the poet's works. Anthologies are not the only evidence for this – I will also touch on the presence

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<sup>51</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1971), p. 5.

of his poetry in works of popular fiction and in printed and broadcast media – but it is important to maintain an appreciation of the fact that allusions in works of literature considered canonical today, but which were often marginal at the time of publication, are only part of the story of the overall afterlife of a writer's work. As a result of this desire to retain an awareness of a wider appreciation of Tennyson as well as his reception by a very particular set of writers, this study differs from those of Bloom, Douglas-Fairhurst, Gill and Ricks in its approach to the material. The 'decade-by-decade' approach I am using is at odds with, for example, Gill, who approaches Wordsworth via headings such as 'Fame' and devotes chapters to particular writers and their engagements with his poetry. I believe that, particularly in light of the upheavals in world history in the first half of the twentieth century, approaching the period by decades allows my study to track the patterns in appreciation which shift over the years. This approach also affords the opportunity to link writers who at first seem disparate – Ezra Pound and W. H. Auden in the 1930s, for instance – but whose approaches to Tennyson reveal a hitherto unexplored similarity in technique, casting their differences in political ideology in a new light.

One of the major aims of writing this thesis is to give scholarly substance to Walter Jackson Bate's perception that 'what we are trying desperately to be unlike can tell a great deal about not only what we are doing but why, and a movement may often be better understood by what it concretely opposes than by its theoretical slogans.'<sup>52</sup> Too often in the late twentieth century, critics writing on the relationship between the writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries

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<sup>52</sup> *The Burden of the Past*, p. 21.

have apparently failed to call into question the assumption seemingly made in the poetry of the period that the Victorian heritage had been altogether set aside. For an example we might look at the end of T. S. Eliot's enormously influential poem *The Waste Land*.

I sat upon the shore  
Fishing, with the arid plain behind me  
Shall I at least set my lands in order?  
London Bridge is falling down falling down falling down  
*Poi s'acose nel foco che gli affina*  
*Quando fiam uti chelidon* – O swallow swallow  
*Le Prince d'Aquitaine à la tour abolie*  
These fragments I have shored against my ruins  
Why then Ile fit you. Hieronymo's mad againe.  
Datta. Dayadhvam. Damyata.  
Shantih shantih shantih<sup>53</sup>

In the middle of this dense mass of quotations, which looks so different from anything Tennyson wrote, we find half a line of a song from Tennyson's 1847 poem *The Princess*. Hugh Kenner, one of the earliest experts on Modernist literature, wrote of these lines in 1960 that thanks to Eliot's appropriation of his verse, 'Tennyson's swallow [...] flies away from an earthbound poet, grounded in

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<sup>53</sup> *The Waste Land* lines 423-433, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1969), pp. 74-5. Hereafter *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*.

an iron time'.<sup>54</sup> For Kenner, 'O swallow, swallow' is a 'solo, not a folk ritual' like Eliot's poem.<sup>55</sup> This may be an intentional overstatement, but it nonetheless reveals a perceived hierarchy in which the Modernist poet can transcend the 'iron time' of Victorian poetry, with all the industrial, mundane implications of such a phrase, and achieve something apparently universal in his work, which the Victorians were incapable of achieving. Such prejudice continues: in 2006 Craig Raine's book on Eliot declaims that Tennyson 'doesn't have Eliot's mischievous, modernist cynicism' and Eliot seems preferable as a result; for Raine, Tennyson is inauthentic, a poet of 'the obvious emotions, those standard, strong emotions that every one will admit to'.<sup>56</sup> This thesis will challenge many of the assumptions about the relationship between twentieth-century and nineteenth-century literature which are so prevalent even in twenty-first century criticism and teaching. Eliot's famous statement that a poet's 'significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists' is usually read in conjunction with the copious references to the 'dead poets and artists' which he refers to in his notes to *The Waste Land*.<sup>57</sup> But this study will argue that one of the most significant artistic 'relations' not only for Eliot, but for many other writers in the twentieth century, was the relation with the Victorian Poet Laureate, Alfred Tennyson.

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<sup>54</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot* (London: W. H. Allen, 1960) p. 153.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Craig Raine, *T. S. Eliot* (New York: OUP, 2006), p. 57.

<sup>57</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. 15.

## Chapter Two

### The 1890s

Despite his dissenting background and largely unpatriotic poetry, as well as his residence in Italy, on his death in 1889 Robert Browning's body was transported to London and was eventually enshrined within Poets' Corner. It was not hard to see that the death of Tennyson, which occurred on October the 6<sup>th</sup>, 1892, would be an even more significant occasion. While the later years of Browning's life had seen a surge of interest in his corpus, he was still far less popular with the public at large than Tennyson, who was described soon after his death as 'the only bard who found a gold mine in Parnassus'.<sup>58</sup> Tennyson was well aware of the public interest in the deaths of writers and, in particular, poets in the nineteenth century. When his fellow Cambridge 'Apostle', Richard Monckton Milnes, had edited Keats's *Life, Letters and Literary Remains* in 1848, Tennyson responded to the publication with a poem in *The Examiner*, in which he expressed his deep reservations regarding the idea of writing posthumous biographies of a poet:

He gave the people of his best:

His worst he kept, his best he gave.

My Shakespeare's curse on clown and knave

Who will not let his ashes rest!<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> 'Tennyson', *Review of Reviews* 6 (November 1892), p. 436.

<sup>59</sup> 'To —, After Reading a Life and Letters', lines 25-8, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 847.

Despite this apparent distaste for the biographer's art, Tennyson was aware that written lives would inevitably appear after his death, and in order to maintain a degree of control over his posthumous reputation he had begun going through his letters with his son Hallam, whom he instructed to quote selectively from certain letters and to destroy others.<sup>60</sup> The desire for control over his posthumous reception was not limited to intervening in the construction of his own biography. He stipulated that every edition of his poetry should finish with 'Crossing the Bar',<sup>61</sup> which first appeared in the 1889 *Demeter* collection, and which was written and published after he had recovered from a serious illness. The poem is easily read as autobiographical:

Sunset and evening star,  
And one clear call for me!  
And may there be no moaning of the bar,  
When I put out to sea,  
  
But such a tide as moving seems asleep,  
Too full for sound and foam,  
When that which drew from out the boundless deep  
Turns again home.  
  
Twilight and evening bell,  
And after that the dark!

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<sup>60</sup> See Ian Hamilton, *Keepers of the Flame* (London: Random House, 1992), p. 182.

<sup>61</sup> See Christopher Ricks's notes to *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1458.



And may there be no sadness of farewell,

When I embark;

For though from out our bourne of Time and Place

The flood may bear me far,

I hope to see my Pilot face to face

When I have crost the bar.<sup>62</sup>

The extent to which this was associated with Tennyson just three years after its initial publication is clear from newspaper coverage of his death. *The St. James's Gazette* quoted the first two 'calm and stately' verses in the opening page of its report of his death on the 6<sup>th</sup> October 1892, and the entire poem was reprinted again just three pages later.<sup>63</sup> The first two lines also opened *The Graphic's* report of the poet's passing on the 8<sup>th</sup> October, and *The Spectator* added that the poet 'died as he had hoped to die, in peace, in "such a tide as moving seems asleep, too full for sound and foam"'.<sup>64</sup>

#### A 'Gloriously Beautiful Death'

Ultimately, Tennyson had little to worry about in the immediate press reaction to his passing away. When they were not framing their reports with his own work, journalists followed the tone of the earliest account of the poet's deathbed scene,

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<sup>62</sup> 'Crossing the Bar', *ibid.*, pp. 1458-9.

<sup>63</sup> 'The Poet of Our Age', *St James's Gazette* 25.3843, (6<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 3; *ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>64</sup> 'Lord Tennyson', *The Graphic* 46.1193 (8<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 422; 'News of the Week', *The Spectator* 3354 (8<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 481.

as dictated by his family physician Sir Andrew Clark, who described Tennyson's passing as a 'gloriously beautiful death', and went on:

In all my experience I have never witnessed anything more glorious. There were no artificial lights in the chamber, and all was in darkness save for the silvery light of the moon at its full. The soft beams fell upon the bed, and played upon the features of the dying poet like a halo.<sup>65</sup>

This account set the tone for reporting on his death. The *Pall Mall Budget* described the deathbed scene thus: 'Slowly the sun went down, the blue died out of the sky, and upon the valley below there fell a perfectly white mist. The hills, as our representative was told, put on their purple garments to watch this strange white stillness. [...] The bed on which Lord Tennyson lay, now very near to the gate of death, and with his left hand still resting on his Shakespeare, was in deep darkness; the rest of the room lit up with the glory of the night, which poured in through the uncurtained windows'.<sup>66</sup> One can perhaps discern an echo here in the landscape's 'purple garments' of the 'purple glens' which appear in Tennyson's lyric 'The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls', from *The Princess*.<sup>67</sup>

The newspapers also carried copious elegies for the poet, some of which were published very quickly after his death. Many of these drew their inspiration from Tennyson's own work; a number used verses from 'Crossing the Bar' as

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<sup>65</sup> 'Tennyson Dead', *The Star* 1453 (6<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 2.

<sup>66</sup> 'The Death of Lord Tennyson', in 'Tennyson Supplement' to *Pall Mall Budget* 1255 (13<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 1517.

<sup>67</sup> 'The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls' line 11, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 783.

epigraphs, and others – notably those by Robert Buchanan and Alfred Austin – cited his Arthurian poetry. Elegists also adopted characteristic elements of Tennyson's style, for example the rhythmic echo in William Watson's 'Lachrymae Musarum':

The seasons change, the winds they shift and veer;  
The grass of yesteryear  
Is dead [...].<sup>68</sup>

The metre of the first line is informed by its equivalent in Tennyson's 'Tithonus'; 'The woods decay, the woods decay and fall' – there can be few other explanations for the inclusion of the syntactically unnecessary 'they' in the line.<sup>69</sup> Watson's poem was included in anthologies as late as 1936, and his poem mirrors that of Tennyson in terms of its focus on mortality and mutability.<sup>70</sup> However, the relationship between elegy and quoted poem is rarely as sensitive as it is in this example; the majority of allusions to Tennyson's work in elegies published in 1892 are included to make the reader absolutely certain of the subject of the elegy, as shown by the proportion which are titled 'In Memoriam', and the prevalence of references to 'Crossing the Bar'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> 'Lachrymae Musarum', in *Illustrated London News* 101.2791 (15<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p.474.

<sup>69</sup> 'Tithonus', line 1, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p.1114.

<sup>70</sup> In *The Pocket Book of English Poetry*, (London: The Poetry Society, 1936), pp.94-5.

<sup>71</sup> For 'In Memoriam', see 'In Memoriam', *The Star* 1455 (8<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 2; and 'In Memoriam – Lord Tennyson', by George Augustus Simcox, *The Bookman*, 3.14 (November 1892), pp. 43-44. For 'Crossing the Bar', see, for instance, 'Lord Tennyson' by Edwin Arnold, *Daily Telegraph* 11677 (7<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 5; 'Tennyson' by H. D. Rawnsley, *Valete* (Glasgow: James McLehose & Sons, 1893), p. 5; 'Alfred Tennyson' by 'M. O. W. O.', *The Spectator* 3355 (15<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 528; 'Tennyson' by Dorothea Beale, *ibid.*, 3357 (29<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 595; and 'In Memoriam – Lord Tennyson' by George Augustus Simcox, *The Bookman* III.14 (November, 1892), p. 44.

The widespread poetic enactments of mourning leave the reader in little doubt of Tennyson's importance to literature in English. George Augustus Simcox's poem 'In Memoriam – Lord Tennyson', published in the *Bookman* of November 1892 contains the following lines:

Ask not who next shall bear afar  
The quenchless radiance of the brand,  
Still bright in his unfaltering hand  
Who sleeps: his torch is now a star.

The 'brand' he carried will go on 'shining', living on after he dies, through his works which will remain in the mind of the reading public for all time. And just as almost every composer of newspaper verse felt compelled to write elegies, writing obituaries of Tennyson was considered to be one of the 'sorts of things authors do', in the words of Max Saunders; Ford Madox Ford, an aspiring writer at the time, tried and failed to write such an obituary in 1892 for precisely this reason.<sup>72</sup> Most of these obituaries maintained a level of reverence in keeping with Simcox's poem. A literary correspondent called 'Logroller' in *The Star* wrote that the topics with which Tennyson dealt were 'eternal in the heavens', his poems 'alive yesterday, to-day, and for ever'.<sup>73</sup> In *The Dial* we read that 'in the whole of English literature there are but the names of Shakespeare and Milton and Shelley worthy to be mentioned with his, and the literature of the world can

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<sup>72</sup> Max Saunders, *Ford Madox Ford: A Dual Life Volume I* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p. 53.

<sup>73</sup> 'Logroller' (usually Richard Le Gallienne), 'Tributes to the Dead Poet and his Living Poems', *The Star* 1454 (7<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 2.

add but few others to the list of such immortals',<sup>74</sup> and in *The Graphic* he was called 'the greatest poet of the century'.<sup>75</sup> This placing of Tennyson alongside the most clearly 'immortal' names in English poetry, and claiming that his relevance was not likely to diminish, continued after his death, for example in William Boyd Carpenter's sermon preached in Westminster Abbey in April 1893. Carpenter claimed:

There came moments when bard-like he descended among us with his harp in hand, and whenever he came we gathered round him to hear the songs which he sung, for we knew that he had brooded over his song, and weighted well his words, and therefore, when he sang, men listened.<sup>76</sup>

Augustus Hopkins Strong was still extolling the poet's pre-eminence in 1899, believing Tennyson to be 'the greatest poet of our century', and continuing that 'We may put him next to Milton, if not side by side with Milton and only lower than Shakespeare.'<sup>77</sup> And the generally high regard for the poet seems to have been mirrored by the wider reading public: in 1897 Clement King Shorter wrote of the 'very wide hold upon the public which was his for at least thirty years prior to his death, and which is his to-day'.<sup>78</sup> Evidence of a popular taste for the poet can be found in the performance history of his play *Becket*, written in 1879, finally being

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<sup>74</sup> 'Alfred Tennyson', *The Dial* 13.152 (16<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 232.

<sup>75</sup> 'Lord Tennyson', *The Graphic* 46.1193 (8<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 422.

<sup>76</sup> William Boyd Carpenter, *The Message of Tennyson: A Sermon in Westminster Abbey, April 30, 1893* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1893), pp.15-16.

<sup>77</sup> Augustus Hopkins Strong, *The Great Poets and Their Theology* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1899), p. 521.

<sup>78</sup> Clement King Shorter, *Victorian Literature* (London: James Bowden, 1897), p. 10.

put on the stage in 1893 by Henry Irving to enthusiastic reviews.<sup>79</sup> This popular appeal underlines the approval given to the poet in 1891 by Edmund Gosse, who believed Tennyson's widespread popularity to be 'one of the most singular, as it is one of the most encouraging features of our recent literary history'.<sup>80</sup>

But Tennyson's funeral radically changed Gosse's mind. He witnessed the hordes of people outside the abbey, the presence of whom left him wondering 'what if this vast and sounding funeral should prove to have really been the entombment of English poetry? What if it should be the prestige of verse that we left behind us in the Abbey?'<sup>81</sup> Gosse's fear was that if a poet, inspired by Tennyson's popularity, could pander to popular taste – as the *St James's Gazette* put it, if they could 'contrive to tickle the ears and stimulate the thoughts of the Contemporary Public' – they could rise to fame without the approval of the small coterie of genuine poetry lovers whom the author of the article called 'the cultivated' as opposed to the 'half-educated'.<sup>82</sup> To Gosse, this was unthinkable. He went on to ask, 'Is Tennyson, great as he is, a thousand times greater than Wordsworth? [...] The democracy, I fear, doth protest too much, and there is danger in this hollow reverence'.<sup>83</sup> For Gosse, as Peter McDonald has put it, 'cultural democratisation necessarily entailed devaluation'; he therefore could not

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Frederick Wedmore's article 'The Stage: Tennyson's *Becket*', *The Academy* 43 (18<sup>th</sup> February 1893), pp. 158-159.

<sup>80</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'The Influence of Democracy on Literature', *Contemporary Review* LIX (April 1891), p. 525.

<sup>81</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'Tennyson', *The New Review* VII.42 (November 1892), p. 514. The essay was reprinted the following year in Gosse's collection of essays *Questions at Issue* (London: Heinemann, 1893), with the title 'Tennyson – and After', the inspiration for the title of this thesis.

<sup>82</sup> *St James's Gazette* XXV.3848 (12<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'Tennyson', *The New Review* VII.42 (November 1892), p. 515.

view the near-universal acclaim for Tennyson as necessarily positive for English literature.<sup>84</sup>

And yet Gosse's attitude to Tennyson changed again, less than a year later. He reprinted the essay containing these comments in his 1893 collection, *Questions at Issue*, under the title 'Tennyson and After', but in an appendix also included a letter from George Gissing, entitled 'Tennyson – and After?' Gissing write that 'the popular mind is my study, and I know that Tennyson's song no more reached it than it reached the young-eyed cherubim.'<sup>85</sup> He took great pains to point out that poetry was not popular – he cited the 'custodian of a Free Library' who claimed to issue around one volume of poetry a month – and reported a conversation between two retired shopkeepers, reading the newspapers, one of whom remarked 'A great deal here about Lord Tennyson'; the other replied 'Ah – yes.'<sup>86</sup> The conversation immediately moved on to a discussion of horse racing. For Gissing, 'the mere price of [Tennyson's] works is prohibitive to people who think a shilling a very large outlay for printed paper'.<sup>87</sup>

### The 1897 Memoir

If Tennyson's works were not as widely loved as was claimed in obituaries, it is nonetheless true that he remained a dominant presence in literary periodicals

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<sup>84</sup> Peter D. McDonald, *British Literary Culture and Publishing Practice 1880-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 6. Hereafter McDonald.

<sup>85</sup> Letter from George Gissing to Edmund Gosse, 20<sup>th</sup> November, 1892, reprinted as 'Tennyson – and After?' in Edmund Gosse's *Questions at Issue* (London: William Heinemann, 1893), p. 325.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 328; *ibid.*, p. 330.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 329. The cheapest pocket edition of Tennyson's *Poetical Works* advertised by Macmillan in May 1892 was priced at 7s. 6d. In Matthew Arnold, *Essays in Criticism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Series (London: Macmillan, 1892), p. 16.

long into the final decade of the nineteenth century, as is clear from the *Athenaeum* review of Hallam Tennyson's officially-sanctioned *Memoir* of his father in 1897; the reviewer believed that 'the eagerness with which these volumes have been awaited shows that Tennyson's hold upon the British public is as strong at this moment as it was on the day of his death.'<sup>88</sup> Reviews of this two-volume work (which follows the format of a selection from the poet's letters with occasional editorial glosses and recollections of sayings) were almost universally positive. A reviewer in the *Saturday Review* believed it to be 'a contribution to English literature as unique as it is invaluable'; Edmund Gosse's reaction was to 'gape in pleased excitement at the unexpected richness of the gift' contained within.<sup>89</sup> Gosse wrote that the book 'enables us to look behind the curtain, to see the artist at work, and it is this which raises the biography to a rank in the first order of such writing,' and believed that 'no such contribution to the purest literature has been put before the world for years and years.'<sup>90</sup>

It is true that the biography is still indispensable; it is the only source for many of Tennyson's letters, and contains many biographical details that were unknown to readers of the poet; for example, the fact that on his father's death Tennyson 'slept in the dead man's bed, earnestly desiring to see his ghost'<sup>91</sup>. The biography also contained examples of the poet's views on political matters not explicitly commented on in his work, for example the Chartist uprising, which he believed

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<sup>88</sup> *Athenaeum* 3650 (9<sup>th</sup> October 1897), p. 481.

<sup>89</sup> *Saturday Review* 84.2190 (16<sup>th</sup> October 1897), p. 423; Edmund Gosse, 'The Life of Tennyson', *North American Review* 492 (November 1897), p. 513.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 514; *ibid.*, p. 525.

<sup>91</sup> Hallam Tennyson, *Alfred Lord Tennyson: A Memoir*, 2 Vols. (London: Macmillan & Co., 1897), Vol. I, pp. 72-3. Hereafter *Memoir*.



should be met not by universal imprisonment and repression, but by a widespread National education, by more of a patriotic and less of a party spirit in the Press, by partial adoption of Free Trade principles, and by an increased energy and sympathy among those who belonged to the different forms of Christianity.<sup>92</sup>

The *Memoir* also contains the poet's assessments of his own poetry, such as the claim that *In Memoriam* 'is a poem, *not* an actual biography', whose narrator 'is not always the author speaking of himself, but the voice of the human race speaking thro' him'.<sup>93</sup> We are told of the events leading up to his appointment as Laureate; the night before he was offered the post 'he dreamt that Prince Albert came and kissed him on the cheek, and that he said in his dream, "Very kind, but very German."<sup>94</sup> Hallam details his father's fondness for novels, particularly those of Austen, whose 'Dramatis Personæ come nearest to those of Shakespeare',<sup>95</sup> and we also learn that Tennyson believed that 'One must distinguish [...] Keats, Shelley, and Byron from the great sage poets of all, who are both great thinkers and great artists, like Æschylus, Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe'.<sup>96</sup> The later part of the biography is more anecdotal, with material from many of Tennyson's friends, including a transcription of a conversation he had about science and poetry with his family physician George Dabbs, and accounts of his meetings with George Eliot. It could be argued that these take up such a large amount of the book because the events in his life were rather

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid., p. 185.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., pp.304-5.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 335.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., Vol. II, p. 372.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 287.

mundane (Andrew Lang commented on the *Memoir* that 'his life is without adventure, almost without incident');<sup>97</sup> the most exciting foreign trip he took was that of 1830, where he and Arthur Henry Hallam travelled to Spain to deliver funds to Torrijos's rebels, an expedition which is not dwelt on at any great length in the *Memoir*. Tennyson's life cannot be called uninteresting; nonetheless it is clear that the *Memoir* was not accepted with complete satisfaction. Lang, perhaps wishing for an easier job as reviewer, complained of its format that 'perhaps a chapter on Tennyson's literary *dicta* might have been given',<sup>98</sup> and Gosse noted that with the exception of F. W. H. Myers, 'no person under sixty years of age has been asked to contribute any recollections or experiences'; he thought that this lent the book 'a curious caducity, a sense of stirring the dust amid yellowing papers, in the recesses of an ancient desk that smells of *pot-pourri*'.<sup>99</sup> Gosse went on to identify the 'roughness' of Hallam's editing and prose, but concluded that this style is 'the growl of the watch-dog guarding his Master in his sleep. Or, to change the simile, it is the artisan throwing open the doors of a monument which has at last been completed.'<sup>100</sup>

Hallam's biography was the only major life of the poet published between 1892 and 1949;<sup>101</sup> it would appear that Tennyson had succeeded, at least partially, in securing control over his posthumous reception. Criticism written in the 1890s was generally complimentary about his work: he was frequently

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<sup>97</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Alfred Lord Tennyson', *Longman's Magazine* 31 (November 1897), p. 28.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 27.

<sup>99</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'The Life of Tennyson', pp. 525-6. This image prefigures lines 16-18 of T. S. Eliot's 'Burnt Norton', 'but to what purpose / Disturbing the dust on a bowl of rose-leaves / I do not know', *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 171.

<sup>100</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'The Life of Tennyson', p. 526.

<sup>101</sup> Thomas Lounsbury's *The Life and Times of Tennyson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1915) is incomplete as it only details the poet's life to 1850; Harold Nicolson's 1923 study of the poet is more a work of criticism than a biography.

assimilated into national history, George W. Alger claiming that he was the 'Poet of the English Race' in 1896,<sup>102</sup> and Theodore Watts-Dunton writing in 1893 that on meeting the poet one felt 'that the man himself was greater than his work'.<sup>103</sup> E. H. Blakeney wrote in 1893 that Tennyson was 'the spokesman of his generation, the audible voice of all that was fairest in the thought of the time, whose words have, even during his lifetime, written themselves for ever upon the heart of a mighty people.'<sup>104</sup> And a petition which was started in 1894 requesting funds for a memorial at Farringford quickly raised enough money to erect a granite cross, which still stands today. The outright Christian associations of this memorial echo the frequent occasions on which he was described in near-religious tones, for example in Anne Thackeray Ritchie's short essay of 'Reminiscences' in 1893 where she claimed that

Lord Tennyson's old shepherd was like some character out of the Bible – simple, pious, assiduous, living among his flocks and tending them to the last.<sup>105</sup>

His status as a near-prophet led many, like William MacNeile Dixon, to believe that his death 'seemed almost in a sense to bring the history of English poetry to a close.'<sup>106</sup> He was still being referred to as 'The Laureate' in 1893 and in A. T.

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<sup>102</sup> George W. Alger, 'Tennyson as Poet of the English People', *Poet-Lore* 8 (1896), p. 329.

<sup>103</sup> Theodore Watts-Dunton, 'The Portraits of Lord Tennyson – I', *The Magazine of Art* (1893) p. 40.

<sup>104</sup> E. H. Blakeney, *The Teaching of Tennyson* (Pamphlet reprinted from *The Churchman*, 1893), p. 8.

<sup>105</sup> Anne Thackeray Ritchie, 'Reminiscences', *Alfred, Lord Tennyson and his Friends*, Julia Margaret Cameron and H. H. H. Cameron (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1893), p. 9.

<sup>106</sup> William MacNeile Dixon, *A Primer of Tennyson* (London: Methuen & Co., 1896), p. 125.

Schuman's 1895 poem 'A Ballade of Poets' his position in English poetry remains unchallenged:<sup>107</sup>

Fled are the mighty bards and few;  
The ways of song are barren, wan....  
Fled is the perfect manner, too,  
Since Alfred Tennyson is gone.<sup>108</sup>

There was no shortage of potential successors to Tennyson as Laureate; indeed, in his memoirs, the satirist William Hurrell Mallock describes his stay at a country house in 1892. On the morning that Tennyson's death is announced, two poets who are also guests strangely fail to appear for breakfast, and stay in their rooms until noon, finally appearing 'like men who had got rid of a burden'.<sup>109</sup> The fruits of their labour appear the next day in newspapers, and are poems about the nation's irreparable loss. Mallock notes that both of the poems they produced do, however, imply 'that a poet existed who was not unfit to repair' this loss.<sup>110</sup> And yet the Laureateship remained unoccupied from 1892 to 1896.

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<sup>107</sup> See, for example, William Canton's essay 'Tennyson' in *In The Footsteps of the Poets* ed. David Masson et al. (London: Isbister & Company, 1893), p. 367.

<sup>108</sup> A. T. Schuman, 'A Ballade of Poets', *The Dial* XIX.217 (1<sup>st</sup> July 1895), p. 25.

<sup>109</sup> William Hurrell Mallock, *Memoirs of Life and Literature* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1920), p. 90.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

### Alfred Austin and the Laureateship

The previous three Laureates, Southey, Wordsworth and Tennyson, had all been gifted poets, and with Tennyson's popularity, the question of who would inherit the laureateship was a matter of national debate in the 1890s. Wordsworth wrote almost no official verse as Laureate, and was well past his poetic prime when he was appointed in 1843. However, having a true 'great' as Laureate enhanced the reputation of the position, which had been largely neglected in the eighteenth century, and which was only really resurrected with the appointment of Southey, appointed in 1813. Following Wordsworth's death in 1850, Tennyson was the natural choice,<sup>111</sup> both of the poetry-reading public and, apparently, of royalty as well – according to his son, Tennyson was appointed as Laureate following Wordsworth's death in 1850 'owing chiefly to Prince Albert's admiration for *In Memoriam*'.<sup>112</sup> There is no doubt that Tennyson was a very fitting, and fortuitous, choice as Laureate. George W. Alger wrote in 1896 that his writings represent 'the slow deep feeling of his race, its sorrows and its joy'.<sup>113</sup> This idea of Tennyson as a timeless, national 'Vates' figure was widely upheld on his death. He was seen as 'the greatest of [England's] poets since Milton', 'the Virgil of the nation'.<sup>114</sup>

Despite the prominent status of the position of Laureate, a successor was not appointed until New Year's Day, 1896. In the interim there was a great deal of conjecture in the press about the post. The correspondent 'M.A.' wrote to the

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<sup>111</sup> Samuel Rogers was offered the post before Tennyson, but turned it down on the grounds of his age.

<sup>112</sup> *Memoir* Volume I, p. 334.

<sup>113</sup> George W. Alger, 'Tennyson as Poet of the English People', *Poet-Lore* 8 (1896), p. 328.

<sup>114</sup> E. H. Blakeney, *The Teaching of Tennyson* p. 3.

*Times* in late 1894 that 'the matter is becoming a bad joke', and a 'cruel affront and injury to the most precious and least rewarded branch of the literature of England'.<sup>115</sup> In *The Idler* at the same time, many of the most important names in English literature were canvassed on who they thought should be Laureate. The dominant name was Swinburne – he secured the vote of, among others, Coulson Kernahan, Gissing, E. Nesbit and Oscar Wilde, the last of whom said that Swinburne 'is already the Poet Laureate of England', as 'he whom all poets love is the Laureate Poet always'.<sup>116</sup> Despite publishing one of the better elegies for Tennyson,<sup>117</sup> Swinburne was unlikely to be chosen either by the Queen or Lord Salisbury, the Tory Prime Minister, given his republican views and the lingering association of his work with indecency after the scandal generated by the publication of *Poems and Ballads* in 1866. The other outstanding candidate was William Morris, who according to his biographer J. W. Mackail was privately sounded out by a cabinet minister about the possibility of succeeding Tennyson, to which Morris responded that 'his principles and tastes alike made it impossible for him to accept'.<sup>118</sup> Rudyard Kipling, who was certainly nationalistic enough to fulfil the task, was too young and scarcely lived up to Tennyson's bardic image, even if he was already popular; other names were the relatively obscure Lewis Morris and William Watson. The idea which gained most support was not, however, the appointment of Swinburne, but the abolition of the position. This

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<sup>115</sup> 'M. A.', 'The Laureateship, *Times* 34453 (21<sup>st</sup> December 1894), p. 12.

<sup>116</sup> 'Who Should Be Laureate?', *The Idler* 7 (Feb-July 1895), p. 403.

<sup>117</sup> A. C. Swinburne, 'Threnody', *The Nineteenth Century* 33 (January 1893), pp. 1-3.

<sup>118</sup> J. W. Mackail, *The Life of William Morris*, 2 Vols. (New York: Dover Publications, 1995), Vol. II, p. 288.

was most strikingly voiced by Grant Allen, who claimed that 'I don't think we ought to have a Laureate at all.'<sup>119</sup>

The calls for the position to be abolished were not successful, and the privilege was eventually granted to Alfred Austin, on New Year's Day, 1896. Wilfrid Scawen Blunt noted that 'Austin himself used to say that his appointment was a very simple matter, the recognition of his being at the head of English literature', but the appointment was really inspired by Austin's political views.<sup>120</sup> In his youth, Austin had written disparagingly of the role of Laureate – in 1861 we find him ranting,

Degraded Genius! stooping to the yoke  
Of annual pence and some pert Premier's joke,  
Once and for all these shameful links discard!  
Let verse, like Virtue, be its own reward!  
Dismiss, with scornfully impartial frown,  
Snarls from the gutter, guerdons from the Crown.<sup>121</sup>

Ten years after publishing this, Austin attacked Tennyson specifically – in an 1870 essay he wrote that the Laureate's work was 'the poetry of the drawing-room, rather than the music of the Spheres', and described the *Idylls* as 'exquisite cabinet pictures; but that is all'.<sup>122</sup> But despite this apparent disdain for

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<sup>119</sup> 'Who Should Be Laureate?'. *The Idler* 7 (Feb-July 1895), p. 409.

<sup>120</sup> Quoted in Norton B. Crowell, *Alfred Austin: Victorian* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1953), p. 20. Hereafter Crowell.

<sup>121</sup> Alfred Austin, *My Satire and its Censors* (London: George Mainwaring, 1861), p. 23.

<sup>122</sup> Alfred Austin, 'Tennyson', *The Poetry of the Period* (London: Richard Bentley, 1870), p. 25; *ibid*, p.6.

the role of Laureate, Austin was squarely conservative in his politics, standing for election in Taunton in 1865 and writing leaders for *The Standard* from 1866. This political allegiance is reflected in his later literary output. Austin had dedicated a play to Queen Victoria in 1887, and in the 1890s he was close to Lord Salisbury, to whose conservative political views he closely adhered in his prolific journalism. George Meredith viewed the appointment of Austin to the Laureateship with some scorn: 'it will suit little Alfred to hymn the babies of the house of Hanover.'<sup>123</sup> In *The Critic* of the month of his appointment we read that 'Tennyson has occasionally been called Alfred the Great. He will be called so oftener hereafter'.<sup>124</sup>

By 1892 Austin's opinion of Tennyson had altered; his enthusiasm had sufficiently increased to write a fairly long elegy to the poet, 'inspired' by one of Tennyson's Arthurian poems, the quasi-autobiographical 'Merlin and the Gleam'. Austin's poem begins 'Merlin has gone – has gone!' and carries a passage from Tennyson's poem as its epigraph.<sup>125</sup> That Austin is one of the poets who stay in their rooms fervently expressing their grief in Mallock's story is fairly clear, not least from the fact that Mallock mentions Austin immediately after his story. 'The Passing of Merlin' was ready in time for *The Times* to run it on the 7<sup>th</sup> October, and it was widely reprinted, for example in the *Illustrated London News* and the *Graphic*. Austin focuses on Tennyson's Arthurian poems – 'To-day is dole in Astolat' – before going on to address what, for him, made Tennyson great:<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Quoted in Crowell, p. 155.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>125</sup> Alfred Austin, 'The Passing of Merlin' line 1, *The Times* 33763 (7<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 10.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, line 16.



In English gardens fringed with English foam,  
Or girt with English woods, he loved to dwell,  
Singing of English lives in thorp or dell,  
Orchard or croft; so that when now we roam  
Through them, and find Him not, it scarcely feels like home.<sup>127</sup>

It is clear what Austin values most about Tennyson from the poem – the *Idylls* are now viewed as a sort of national epic, with Tennyson the pre-eminent ‘national bard’, as is clear from the lines quoted above; he is elevated to semi-divine status, with the ‘H’ of ‘him’ capitalised at places in the poem. Austin’s conception of Tennyson is designed not only to praise him but also to create an image of the laureate which he is capable of assuming when the post becomes vacant. Austin wrote a poem entitled ‘Who Would Not Die For England!’ in 1888, had published *English Lyrics* in 1890, and continued to write poetry with nationalist subjects after being appointed Laureate: in 1896 he published the ‘Dramatic Tragedy’ *England’s Darling*, a play about Alfred the Great, a very popular figure at the time – indeed in an elegy Tennyson’s friend Francis Turner Palgrave described the poet as ‘Last of the lordly line, / Alfred to Alfred!’<sup>128</sup> Austin’s poetic output was clearly focused on nationalistic matters, and his appointment as Laureate is therefore not entirely surprising; what is surprising is the speed with which he took to writing ‘official’ verse. The first poem he published as Laureate was ‘Jameson’s Ride’, perhaps an attempt to write in the

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., lines 51-55.

<sup>128</sup> Francis Turner Palgrave, ‘In Pace’, lines 20-21, *The Nineteenth Century* 32.189 (November 1892) pp. 836-7.

manner of Kipling, which was published in *The Times* on January 11, 1896. The poem is far from a classic – it begins:

Wrong! Is it wrong? Well, may be  
But I'm going, boys, all the same.  
Do they think me a Burgher's baby,  
To be scared by a scolding name?  
They may argue, and prate, and order;  
Go, tell them to save their breath:  
Then, over the Transvaal border,  
And gallop for life or death!<sup>129</sup>

Critics were not impressed by the literary merits of this piece, but it was less the poetic form which was found to be so offensive, and more the content. It is not hard to see what attracted Austin to the topic – Tennyson's most famous piece of official verse is still 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', and if Austin could quickly publish a poem praising a British military raid, also made up of around 600 men, it could help strengthen the case of the younger Alfred in his attempt to establish himself as an acceptable successor to the elder.

The problem, for Austin, was that the raid had never been officially sanctioned. Starr Jameson had grown impatient with the lack of official British intervention in the Transvaal republic, where the ruling party had put in measures to restrict the enfranchisement of the Utlanders, British expatriate workers.

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<sup>129</sup> Quoted in Crowell, p. 21.

Jameson decided to march towards Johannesburg over New Year in 1895-6, with the aim of supporting the Utlanders in an uprising. However, the support Jameson anticipated never materialised; the impetus of the raid quickly petered out, and Jameson surrendered.<sup>130</sup> It is understandable why a loyal Tory like Austin would want to glorify such an endeavour; however, as a close friend of the Prime Minister, he should have been aware that Jameson's actions were opposed by the Colonial Office, and as Poet Laureate he should, strictly speaking, have condemned the attack rather than have praised it. Austin's reputation never fully recovered from this episode, and the poem, coupled with his consistently outspoken patriotism, left him open to ridicule throughout his poetic career. As late as 1909 he published the following:

Let the world change, I shall not change  
Nor yield dominion of my mind,  
But with ancestral freedom range  
The mightier days behind.  
Should statesmen abdicate control  
They who should rule be toppled down,  
Naught can dethrone the regal soul  
Or rob it of its Crown.<sup>131</sup>

Such sentiments are excusable if the poetry is of sufficient quality to temper the tone – but here the heavy, laboured rhyme scheme only serves to make the

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<sup>130</sup> See Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Abacus, 1992), pp. 1-5.

<sup>131</sup> Quoted in Crowell, p. 191.

ideas being expressed seem as thoughtless as those in 'Jameson's Ride'. These frequent lapses in quality, coupled with Austin's self-importance (he signed poems 'A. A.' in the national press assuming that all literate people would recognise his work immediately), were very easy to ridicule, and writers in *Punch*, among other publications, seized on the opportunity as soon as 'Jameson's Ride' was published. The *Punch* parody begins:

'Say, is it song? Well – blow it!  
But I'll sing it, boys, all the same  
Because I'm the Laureate Poet,  
That's the worst of having a name!  
I must be inspired to order,  
"Go, tell 'em, to save their breath:"  
I can rhyme to "order" with "border,"  
And jingle to "breath" with "death".'<sup>132</sup>

With such an inferior – and unpopular – poet as laureate, it is not hard to see why Tennyson still remained 'the Laureate' in much criticism of the period.

Not everyone, however, was united in their continuing reverence for Tennyson. The poets who made up the 'Rhymers' Club' barely ever allude to his work in their poetry, or indeed in their correspondence, and he was peripheral to the *Yellow Book*.<sup>133</sup> The most striking example of a dissenting voice in the period

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<sup>132</sup> Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>133</sup> W. B. Yeats wrote of his days in the Rhymers' Club that 'Swinburne in one way, Browning in another, and Tennyson in a third, had filled their work with what I called "impurities", curiosities

was that of Francis Adams. He died in 1893 but a posthumous collection of essays was published in 1899, which opened with an essay on Tennyson which is striking for its attacks on the poet's intellect. Adams believed the poet to be 'shockingly wanton in knowledge as a thinker and in self-respect as a man', going on to question the level of Tennyson's regard for Arthur Hallam, as 'no one who has perused the literary remains of Arthur Hallam could tolerate it for a moment.'<sup>134</sup> *In Memoriam* 'would be one of the most dishonest works ever written by a man of ability were it not for a dozen snatches of sweet and true affection which he had in his heart of hearts for his friend.'<sup>135</sup> Adams is slightly more even-handed elsewhere in the essay, where he acknowledges the quality of 'Crossing the Bar', and the main object of the piece is to hold the poet in 'an equality with Wordsworth and Byron and Keats, with Coleridge and Shelley, with Gray and Burns.'<sup>136</sup> This was also being attempted elsewhere in the period, for example in Leslie Stephen's 1898 *Studies of a Biographer*. He believed the hero of 'Maud' to be 'not only morbid, but silly',<sup>137</sup> and wrote of Tennyson in comparison with the 'great sage poets,' whom the Laureate had identified as at once thinkers and artists, such as Aeschylus, Shakespeare, Dante, and Goethe:

Did he not only accept the right view, whatever that may be, but  
express it forcibly and majestically as one of the small class which

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about politics, about science, about history, about religion; and that we must create once more the pure work.' *Autobiographies* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1955), p. 167.

<sup>134</sup> Francis Adams, 'Tennyson', *Essays in Modernity* (London: John Lane, 1899), p. 17; *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>137</sup> Leslie Stephen, 'Life of Tennyson', *Studies of a Biographer*, 2 Vols. (London: Duckworth & Co., 1898), Vol. II, p. 237.

represents poetry thoroughly transfused with philosophy? I at least cannot see my way to such a conclusion: and the mere comparison seems to me to suggest the real limitations to Tennyson's art.<sup>138</sup>

### Conrad and Housman

Another voice questioning Tennyson in this period was that of A. E. Housman. He was appointed Professor of Latin at University College London in 1892, and his collection *A Shropshire Lad* was published in 1896. From biographical accounts it would appear that Housman was just as ambivalent about Tennyson's merits as Stephen. The Professor was famous for his outspoken responses to papers at the literary society at University College, and R. W. Chambers recalls a memorable paper by Housman on Arnold, in which:

He described the argument of *In Memoriam* as being that 'things must come right in the end, because it would be so very unpleasant if they did not,' adding that, if God had answered Tennyson out of the whirlwind as He answered Job, He would have said, 'Who is this that darkeneth counsel by words without knowledge?'<sup>139</sup>

Chambers recalls that Housman 'reminded me of Sir Lancelot in Tennyson's *Idylls of the King* – a comparison which, had I ventured to suggest it, would have

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>139</sup> R. W. Chambers, 'A London Memoir', Katharine E. Symons, A. W. Pollard, Laurence Housman, R. W. Chambers, Alan Ker, A. S. F. Gow and John Sparrow, *Alfred Edward Housman* (New York: Henry Holt And Company, 1937), p. 55.

brought upon my head his fiercest wrath',<sup>140</sup> and also remembers another Literary Society debate in which Chambers claimed that 'if the *Idylls* had not got the spirit of Malory, they would interest future generations as showing the spirit of the Victorian age. Housman, when his turn came to reply, retorted, "Then, in that case, people will judge that the Victorian age was an age flowing with milk and water."<sup>141</sup> Housman also struck out several of Tennyson's poems from his copy of the 1897 edition of Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* – 'What does Little Birdie Say', 'In the Children's Hospital', 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', 'Frater Ave Atque Vale' and 'The Wreck'.<sup>142</sup> According to Philip Larkin, these were 'neatly but decisively deleted' thanks to 'a pencil line ruled vertically down the centre of the poem'.<sup>143</sup> As Larkin has noted, Housman's attitude to the anthology is inconsistent, since he deletes 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' but keeps in three much more overtly militaristic poems by Sir Francis Doyle.<sup>144</sup> One could conclude from this that Housman, like Yeats, was an emerging poet in the 1890s who was trying to move away from Tennyson. Several critics have written about Housman's poetic technique as a specific reaction to the earlier Victorian poets: Norman Page, for example, wrote in 1983 that 'some of the rarer lexical items in Housman's verse illustrate the contemporary taste for Saxon plainness in reaction against Tennysonian and Swinburnian ornateness'.<sup>145</sup> And yet Tennyson retains a slight presence in *A Shropshire Lad*. The poem 'As through the wild green hills of Wyre' recalls the sentiment of *In Memoriam* VII, which is quoted in

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>142</sup> Philip Larkin, 'Palgrave's Last Anthology: A. E. Housman's Copy', *Review of English Studies* 22.87 (August 1971), pp. 312-4.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., p. 315.

<sup>145</sup> Norman Page, *A. E. Housman: A Critical Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 204.

the introduction to this thesis. Housman's poem is narrated by a man leaving Shropshire for London, who dwells on his hand:

Aching on my knee it lay:  
That morning half a shire away  
So many an honest fellow's fist  
Had well-nigh wrung it from the wrist.  
Hand, said I, since now we part  
From fields and men we know by heart,  
For strangers' faces, strangers' lands, –  
Hand, you have held true fellows' hands.  
Be clean then; rot before you do  
A thing they'd not believe of you.<sup>146</sup>

The poem ends with an address to the 'true fellows':

About your work in town and farm  
Still you'll keep my head from harm,  
Still you'll help me, hands that gave  
A grasp to friend me to the grave.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> A. E. Housman, 'XXXVII' lines 7-16, *Collected Poems and Selected Prose* ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Allen Lane, 1988), p. 61.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 33-6.



Both poems are concerned with the hand as the link with both a living past and a dead future, in a relationship between men which nonetheless depends on human contact.

Housman's work deals with ideas of masculinity and nationhood, and its 'Saxon plainness' lent it sufficient accessibility to become a favourite in the trenches of the Great War. A writer who was more self-consciously 'highbrow' who came to prominence in the 1890s was the Polish-born Joseph Conrad. Conrad was acutely aware of the subtly differing merits and audiences of different periodicals in the period. He disparaged novelists who were 'popularites' expressing the 'common thought',<sup>148</sup> and refused to give *Pearson's Magazine* his short story 'The Return' as it was 'much too good to be thrown away where the *right people* won't see it.'<sup>149</sup> It is clear from his correspondence at the time that he understood that he would not necessarily find a great audience for his work – he wrote of Wagner and Rodin as kindred spirits, who 'both had to starve a little in their day', and believed that his admirers would doubtless be 'limited' in size.<sup>150</sup> Conrad believed in fiction as high art, and never professed a particularly high opinion of the Victorian Laureate – he believed that 'There's more poesy on one page of [Robert Bridges's] *Shorter Poems* than in the whole volume of Tennyson'.<sup>151</sup> This makes it all the more surprising that he should allude to the same passage of 'Maud' twice in four years, in *The Return* (1898) and *Youth*

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<sup>148</sup> Letter from Joseph Conrad to Aniela Zagórska, Christmas 1898, *Collected Letters Volume II: 1898-1902*, ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986) p. 137.

<sup>149</sup> To William Blackwood, 31 May 1902, *ibid* p. 418; To T. Fisher Unwin, 5<sup>th</sup> November 1897, *Collected Letters Volume I: 1861-1897*, ed. Frederick R. Karl and Laurence Davies (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 405.

<sup>150</sup> To William Blackwood, 31 May 1902, Conrad, *Letters II*, p. 418; Conrad, *Letters I*, to Baroness Jania de Brunnow, 2 October 1897, p. 390.

<sup>151</sup> Conrad, *Letters I*, To Edward Garnett, 26<sup>th</sup> November 1897, p. 413.

(1902). In the former, the marriage of a middle-class London couple disintegrates over the course of one evening. The husband, Alvan Hervey, discovers in a letter that his wife is leaving him, and as his emotions spiral out of control, he becomes 'afraid with that penetrating faltering fear that seems, in the very middle of a beat, to turn one's heart into a handful of dust'.<sup>152</sup> The allusion could be to a passage from John Donne's 1624 *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, or indeed the Bible, but the most recent, and famous, use of the phrase was undoubtedly the following from 'Maud':

Dead, long dead,  
Long dead!  
And my heart is a handful of dust,  
And the wheels go over my head,  
And my bones are shaken with pain,  
For into a shallow grave they are thrust,  
Only a yard beneath the street,  
And the hoofs of the horses beat, beat,  
The hoofs of the horses beat,  
Beat into my scalp and my brain [...].<sup>153</sup>

The narrator of the poem is by this stage caught up in a frenzy as he has lost his betrothed, and envisages himself as buried alive. It is not hard to see the

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<sup>152</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'The Return', in *Almayer's Folly and Tales of Unrest* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1947), p. 135.

<sup>153</sup> 'Maud' II.V.i lines 239-248, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, pp.1086-1087.

similarities between the two positions – Hervey has been spurned by his wife for reasons he cannot fathom, and the narrator of ‘Maud’ cannot comprehend the loss of his lover either. Behind both passages there is also a focus on the upper-middle class (be they rural, as in ‘Maud’, or urban as in ‘The Return’), whose outward prosperity is at odds with the tortured emotional state of the characters. The second citation of the phrase comes in ‘Youth’, where Conrad’s famous narrator Marlow is first introduced. He has been accepted on a ship, the *Judea*, to make his first journey to the East, at twenty years of age (Marlow recounts the story at the age of forty-two). After a tortuous journey from London to Newcastle, the ship crashes on the Tyne and finally sets off for Bangkok. Marlow’s account is peppered with exclamations about the excitement he felt at this adventure, such as ‘O youth! The strength of it, the faith of it, the imagination of it!’ and reinforced by his belief that the ship represents ‘the endeavour, the test, the trial of life.’<sup>154</sup> As the journey progresses, the ship undergoes many hardships which Marlow meets with unflinching optimism to the end. One such incident is a massive explosion which takes place when ‘Java head’ was ‘190 miles off.’<sup>155</sup> Marlow is thrown through the air by the explosion and describes the immediate aftermath:

The coal-dust suspended in the air of the hold had glowed dull-red at the moment of the explosion. In the twinkling of an eye, in an

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<sup>154</sup> Joseph Conrad, ‘Youth’: A Narrative’, in *Youth: A Narrative, Heart of Darkness, and The End of the Tether* (London: Dent, 1967), p. 12; *ibid.*

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.

infinitesimal fraction of a second since the first tilt of the bench, I  
was sprawling full length on the cargo.<sup>156</sup>

He survives both the blast and its aftermath, affording him the chance to see the  
'jagged wall of purple at sunset' of the East.<sup>157</sup> And ultimately his relief is as  
much concerned with having had the fortune of experiencing such an incident as  
it is with his survival:

I remember my youth and the feeling that will never come back any  
more – the feeling that I could last for ever, outlast the sea, the  
earth, and all men; the deceitful feeling that lures us on to joys, to  
perils, to love, to vain effort – to death; the triumphant conviction of  
strength, the heat of life in the handful of dust, the glow in the heart  
that with every year grows dim, grows cold, grows small, and  
expires – and expires, too soon, too soon – before life itself.<sup>158</sup>

Marlow has elsewhere in 'Youth' claimed to have read *Sartor Resartus* on the  
voyage,<sup>159</sup> and it is likely that he would have read 'Maud' at some point before  
narrating the story. Both Marlow and Hervey appear to be aware of the intricacies  
of the passage from 'Maud'; the narrator in Tennyson's poem at once envisages  
himself as dead and yet the urgency with which he feels his life is manifested  
through the repetition of 'beat' and the commas at the end of the lines. It would

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid., pp.36-7.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

also seem that the passage has been in Marlow's mind ever since he spoke of 'the coal-dust suspended in the air', a potent symbol of the energy of life and one which energises Alvan Hervey's idea of the handful of dust as representative of death. The allusion to Tennyson energizes the work of the emerging writer, Conrad, whose return to the image highlights an unlikely continuing engagement with the Victorian Laureate.

## Chapter Three

### The 1900s

In an editorial published on the 31<sup>st</sup> December 1900, *The Times* celebrated the century's passing with a list of the great figures of the age – almost all of them male. The list included all the standard great men of the nineteenth century – Gladstone, Nelson, and Byron, for example – and the second poet in the list, after Byron, was Tennyson, described as the 'sweetest singer of his age, "crossing the bar" in the fullness of year and fame.'<sup>160</sup> This sense of Tennyson as the pre-eminent poet of his times is maintained in other critical and literary works published in the early 1900s. Sir Alfred Lyall wrote in 1902 that 'his finest poetry may undoubtedly be treated as an illustrative record of the prevailing spirit, of the temperament, and to some degree of the national character of his period.'<sup>161</sup> This was a direct result of his laureate status, at least according to Morton Luce, who wrote in a short 1901 biography that 'the nobility and the versatile genius of Tennyson gave grace and power even to this kind of poetry [Laureate verse], and to the doubtful office of court minstrel he has added an imperishable dignity.'<sup>162</sup> Andrew Lang went further still, saying that Tennyson 'had lived the life of heaven upon earth, being in all his work a minister of things honourable, lovely, consoling, and ennobling to the souls of others, with a ministry which cannot die.'<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> 'The Century', *The Times* 36339 (31<sup>st</sup> December 1900), p. 11.

<sup>161</sup> Sir Alfred Lyall, *English Men of Letters: Tennyson* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1902), p. 2.

<sup>162</sup> Morton Luce, *Tennyson* (London: M. Dent, 1901), p. 25.

<sup>163</sup> Andrew Lang, *Alfred Tennyson* (London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1901), p. 157.

This quasi-religious tone was continued most explicitly in Robert F. Horton's *Alfred Tennyson: A Saintly Life* (1900), in which Laurence Mazzeno has identified the 'most excessive claims' for Tennyson made in the early twentieth century.<sup>164</sup> In his book, Horton admits to relying on Hallam Tennyson's *Memoir* for the facts of Tennyson's biography, and devotes his efforts to making the case that Tennyson deserves to have his life referred to as 'saintly'. The definition, for Horton, of a saintly artist is one who 'sets before himself a noble ideal, and then, nobly and consistently lives for it, sacrificing everything to it'.<sup>165</sup> Tennyson qualifies, as his life was 'a piece of living which for its heroism, its singleness of aim, its human tenderness, its Divine outlook, passes for ever into the treasure house of humanity'.<sup>166</sup> Horton admires the *Idylls*, believing that criticism of Tennyson's Arthurian poetry is demonstrative of the truths inherent in that poetry:

The world is pleased to sneer at Arthur, and finds him uninteresting  
because he is good. But Tennyson could not help that. He  
accepted the implied scorn. Vivien and Tristram, Ettarre and  
Mordred always scorn the king.

Tennyson was Arthur.<sup>167</sup>

These hyperbolic claims about Tennyson seem a direct continuation of the type of eulogy written about the poet on his death in 1892. Tennyson certainly remained one of the last true poets for many of his admirers, not least the

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<sup>164</sup> Mazzeno, p. 45.

<sup>165</sup> Robert F. Horton, *Alfred Tennyson: A Saintly Life* (London: J. M. Dent & Co., 1900), p. 7.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>167</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Canadian poet Agnes Maule Machar, who ended a poem on the Laureate with the question

What living bard of all thy race  
Can fitly fill thine empty place?  
*Thus* do we speak of thee now thou art dead!<sup>168</sup>

The reverence does not seem to have withered over time, at least for some of the poet's admirers, and it continued long into the decade. In *The Spectator* of the 25<sup>th</sup> August 1906, the ornithologist and teacher Arthur G. Butler published a poem entitled 'A Walk with Tennyson, 1855'. This takes up almost half a page of the magazine, despite being scarcely more than doggerel – the poet remembers the walk of the title, which felt as if it was 'on air', thanks to the presence of the poet:

Ah! what is it to look below  
Where the wavelets murmur with lips of snow,  
And hear him murmur, 'I see, I know!'<sup>169</sup>

The reverential tone, the idea of Tennyson as a seer, and the use of personal, biographical information all adhere to the conventions of most 1890s and 1900s elegies on Tennyson. What is most perhaps striking about this poem is the fact

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<sup>168</sup> Agnes Maule Machar, 'Our Departed Laureate' lines 27-30, *Lays of the "True North" and other Canadian Poems* (London: Elliot Stock, 1902), p. 143.

<sup>169</sup> Arthur G. Butler, 'A Walk with Tennyson, 1855', *The Spectator* 4078 (August 25, 1906), p. 263.



that the editor of the *Spectator* decided that it was worth including in the magazine in 1906, fourteen years after Tennyson died, and only three years before his centenary. It is not entirely surprising to find poets of the age of Butler (who was born in 1831 and was a schoolfriend of Matthew Arnold and Arthur Hugh Clough) voicing such an exalted opinion of Tennyson; he had lived through a period when Tennyson held unparalleled status as a poet, and the form and subject matter of his verse are very traditional. The decision to include it in the relatively conservative periodical was probably intended to appeal to those who mourned the passing of the men who had experienced and contributed to the Victorian age in its prime.

Claims of near-divinity and of Tennyson living a 'saintly life' seem strange to modern readers, but many writers in the 1900s considered Tennyson a religious figure, for example Alice Meynell. In her introduction to *In Memoriam* from 1904, she called Tennyson a 'modern angel of poetry', the religious implications of which were clearly a result of the impact of *In Memoriam*, as emphasised by the American Henry Van Dyke, who believed Tennyson was 'a seer who foresaw the victory of faith and helped mightily to win it'.<sup>170</sup> This seems to be inspired by the poem's acknowledgment of emergent evolutionary theory and the Christian resolution which builds to a crescendo in the final verses of the poem. But not all readers in the 1900s saw *In Memoriam* as an explicitly religious poem. The most important book written about Tennyson in the decade was A. C. Bradley's *A Commentary on Tennyson's In Memoriam*, which was published in 1901, the same year Bradley was appointed Professor of Poetry at Oxford.

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<sup>170</sup> Alice Meynell, 'Introduction' to *In Memoriam* (London: Blackie & Son, 1904), p. x; Henry Van Dyke, *An Introduction to the Poems of Tennyson* (Boston: Ginn & Co., 1903), p. 93.

Bradley is less didactic about the poem's religious importance than the critics cited above, focusing instead on *In Memoriam* as a work of art. He notes:

It is fashion at present to ascribe the great popularity of *In Memoriam* entirely to the 'teaching' contained in it, and to declare that its peculiar position among English elegies has nothing to do with its poetic qualities. This is equivalent to an assertion that, if the so-called substance of the poem had been presented in common prose, the work would have gained the same hold upon the mass of educated readers that is now possessed by the poem itself.<sup>171</sup>

Bradley's book takes the form of a broad biographical introduction (with particular emphasis on the details of Arthur Henry Hallam's life), followed by a section-by-section guide to the poem, explaining the relation of the parts to the whole and what he sees as the chronological structure of the poem. Bradley believed that the poem was specifically concerned with love:

In the first shock of grief the poet felt that the love within him was his truest self, and that it must not die. He clung to it through all his sorrow, and its demands formed a test by which he tried the doubts and fears that beset him. At the end he found that it had conquered time, outlived regret, and grown with his spiritual growth.<sup>172</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> A. C. Bradley, *A Commentary on Tennyson's In Memoriam* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1901), p. 36.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.

Bradley's commentary remains of interest today primarily thanks to his stress on the intricacy, and indeed difficulty, of *In Memoriam*. He believes that 'the meaning of many passages is doubtful, and [...] a few are extremely obscure', and as such takes great care to elucidate all that he can of the poem's meaning.<sup>173</sup>

### Tennyson in Political Fiction of the 1900s

Bradley's focus on the complexity of *In Memoriam* and its poetical merits was, as he stated, in order to ensure it was not merely read for its sentiments. But this insistence on the literary qualities of its language may well also have been motivated by the fact that in 1901, when his book was published, phrases from the poem had become part of a general national vocabulary, as shown by two novels concerning the political upheavals of the day. Richard Whiteing was primarily a journalist, but wrote several novels in his lifetime, including *Ring in the New*, published in 1906. Although Whiteing never considered himself a novelist, *Ring in the New* is an interesting attempt to chronicle both the lives of a new class of young, independent, women making a living in London, and the 'new democracy of London town'.<sup>174</sup> The idea of a conflict between 'the old and the new' is introduced immediately; Prudence Meryon, the heroine, is upbraided by her rich aunt for using the word 'ripping' as an adjective to describe Girton College, Cambridge.<sup>175</sup> She decides against working for her aunt and strikes out on her own, living a hand-to-mouth existence in Holborn and learning to type.

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<sup>173</sup> Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>174</sup> Richard Whiteing, *Ring in the New* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1906), p. 195.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid., p. 12; ibid., pp. 10-11.

Among her fellow students she meets one, Sarah, who is involved with the distribution of a new periodical entitled *The Branding Iron*. This is 'a new journal of society – in the back streets', which is broadly socialist in its agenda and becomes a talking-point among both its target demographic and politicians over the course of the book.<sup>176</sup> In one of its editorials, the journal splits the population into three parts – the million people who earn over £700 a year, the 3.75 million who earn between £700 and £160 a year, and then spells out the last part:

Incomes of less than £160 down to the vanishing point – thirty-eight millions of persons, earners and families all told. Diffuse or perish.  
Ring in the New!<sup>177</sup>

The exhortation to 'Ring in the New' derives from *In Memoriam*,<sup>178</sup> and while the link to Tennyson is not followed up, the citation of his work in a fictional radical journal shows how the famous 'ring out, wild bells' passages of Tennyson's poem had become common currency by the 1900s, so much so that they were deployed in pieces of writing which had little in common with the poet's sentiments in writing the poem. Other lines of Tennyson are quoted in a later copy of *The Branding Iron*:

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<sup>176</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-3.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>178</sup> Christopher Ricks (*The Poems of Tennyson*, pp. 958-9) and H. N. Fairchild (*Modern Language Notes* 64 (1949), pp. 256-8) have noted the similarity of the sentiment of the 'Ring out, wild bells' lines and passages from P. J. Bailey's *Festus* (1839) which Tennyson had read in 1846, but the phrase repeated in *Ring in the New* is from *In Memoriam*.

The rich were never more indifferent about the poor than they are at this moment, when they have got them off their minds by liberal doses of the opiate of charitable and religious ministration.

Tears, idle tears; why the wringing of the hands? All has happened just as might have been expected, just as it has happened before, as it will certainly happen again.<sup>179</sup>

The reference to 'Tears, idle tears' here could be seen as a coded criticism of Tennyson, and by extension his fellow Victorians, who were content to treat the poor with 'charitable and religious ministration.' As later in Tennyson's poem we find nostalgia for 'the days that are no more', the citation of the poem looks ironic – what *The Branding Iron* stands for is progress rather than nostalgia. As a result, the ending of the passage seems strange, as 'Ring out the old!' is quoted<sup>180</sup> – the desire for progress, for change from the Victorian past, is expressed through the words of the same poet whose work was ironized earlier in the same passage. Ultimately 'the new' is indeed rung in, and *The Branding Iron* is a success, instrumental in achieving the fictional victory of the Labour party, 'the first day of the great upheaval which was to change the face of English history in our time.'<sup>181</sup> At this point, the novel becomes openly didactic, as the reader is urged to side with the socialist hero, George Leonard, who is united with Prudence.

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<sup>179</sup> *Ring in the New*, p. 241.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 297.

The sentiment of *Ring in the New* – that writing can effect social change – was proved to be correct, at least to an extent, by Robert Tressell's *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* which was published (posthumously, and in abridged form) in 1914 and whose influence increased over the years, until 1945 when it was claimed that the novel was the chief reason for the Labour Party's election win.<sup>182</sup> Although it was published in the 1910s, it is set in the 1900s and Tressell tried (and failed) to get it published in his lifetime, which was undoubtedly a source of pain for the former painter, as it is clearly designed to be relevant to the first decade of the twentieth century. As the author states in his introduction, he wanted 'to present, in the form of an interesting story, a faithful picture of working-class life – more especially of those engaged in the Building trades – in a small town in the south of England.'<sup>183</sup> The book is a fictionalised autobiography of the lean times Tressell endured as a decorator in Hastings in the early 1900s, living a hand-to-mouth existence (despite his skill as a sign-painter) thanks to the depression. It is a novel designed to expose the terrible conditions in which the working classes live in the 1900s, and the politics of the novel are never in question – as Tressell states in his preface,

I designed to show the conditions resulting from poverty and unemployment: to expose the futility of the measures taken to deal with them and to indicate what I believe to be the only real remedy, namely – Socialism. I intended to explain what Socialists

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<sup>182</sup> See Tristram Hunt's 'Introduction' to *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. xxviii.

<sup>183</sup> Robert Tressell, *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1955), p. 11.

understand by the word 'Poverty': to define the Socialist theory of the causes of poverty, and to explain how Socialists propose to abolish poverty.<sup>184</sup>

Tressell's book comprises a great many characters, most of them painters and decorators, all of whom (barring the corrupt foreman and his employers) live in poverty, under constant fear for their jobs. All are in debt of some form or another, not least Easton, who is forced to pawn most of his clothes and furniture in order to support his wife and baby, and Frank Owen, the 'Tressell' character, who although committed to Socialist politics is deeply aware of the need for money and is driven at times to contemplate suicide and killing his wife and son to end their misery. Owen is nicknamed 'The Professor' by his workmates, as he reluctantly gives lectures at lunch-time on Socialist politics, and although the majority disagree with his views, they nonetheless think him 'a clever sort of chap' because of the way he speaks.<sup>185</sup> What prompts this conclusion is Owen's discussion of the progress of civilisation, where he says that every child who is born is 'one of the heirs of all the ages that have gone before.'<sup>186</sup> The phrase 'heirs of all the ages' is adapted from the end of 'Locksley Hall', and it recurs to Owen later in the novel. As he thinks about the possibilities for the advancement of the individual, he concludes that being an 'efficient money-producing machine' and 'the servile subject of his masters' is 'the status of the majority of the "Heirs

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid., p. 223; *ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

of all the ages” under the present system.’<sup>187</sup> As the next example will show, this is not a simple matter of a phrase being sufficiently well-known to form part of a standard vocabulary, as the passages from Tennyson in *The Branding-Iron* might have been.

It is clear that Tressell, the model of Owen, was not an average decorator – he too was nicknamed ‘The Professor’ and was a voracious reader of novels and poetry (Dickens, Swift, Shelley, Byron and Ruskin were all favourites).<sup>188</sup> The influence of Dickens is by far the most noticeable on his work – many of his characters have idiosyncratic names such as Slyme and Graball D’Enclosedland – and yet there is comparatively little allusion to poetry in the novel. It is no surprise that when it does appear, it is usually in chapters concerning Owen. As he thinks about ‘the unfathomable infinity of space’, Owen, an atheist, muses on the origins of the universe.<sup>189</sup> He dismisses Christianity as it is ‘too absurd’, but also cannot fully trust in evolutionary theory as ‘although it was undoubtedly true as far as it went, it only went part of the way,’ and did not answer the question of the beginning of the universe.<sup>190</sup> For Owen, ‘the question remained unanswered because it was unanswerable,’ and he believes that ‘regarding the problem man was but –

An infant crying in the night,

An infant crying for the light,

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<sup>187</sup> ‘Locksley Hall’ line 178, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 698; *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, p.245.

<sup>188</sup> F. C. Ball, *One of the Damned: The Life and Times of Robert Tressell, Author of The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1979), p.119; *ibid.*, p. 62.

<sup>189</sup> *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, p. 246.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*



And with no language but a cry.'<sup>191</sup>

Owen cannot fully believe in either Christianity or evolution, the two systems of belief most commonly associated with Tennyson's poem, yet these lines from Tennyson's great elegy still resonate with him. What Owen is left with is the 'longing for something to believe', something to hope for.<sup>192</sup> This 'crying for the light' is expressed in lines from Tennyson.

In a much less overtly political work, Florence L. Barclay's novel *The Rosary*, published in 1909, Tennyson's work appears to have maintained its centrality to polite society. The novel is set among the English landed gentry, and its heroine is Jane Champion, 'a perfectly beautiful woman in an absolutely plain shell'<sup>193</sup>, who is thirty years old and is still single. She falls for an artist, Garth Dalmain, but decides against marriage as he is too young, although the real reason is that she is afraid of her own feelings for him. The world in which they live is clearly the very recent past (there is a discussion over forgetting to replace 'Queen' with 'King' in the national anthem), and Tennyson seems to still be popular in this upper-middle-class environment.<sup>194</sup> At the beginning of the novel, Dalmain bemoans the trend for giving 'silly up-to-date' titles to paintings, where 'just now one nondescript word is the fashion', unless you want to attract attention 'by calling your picture twenty lines of Tennyson.'<sup>195</sup> But despite his status as an emerging artist, Dalmain is still keen on the Victorians, even using

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<sup>191</sup> Ibid.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Florence L. Barclay, *The Rosary* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1909), p. 9.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

Tennyson for an anecdote of 'the funniest thing we remember at a concert'.<sup>196</sup>

His was a nervous youth reciting 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', who in his fluster changed the words of the poem to:

Theirs not to make reply;

Theirs not to do or die;

Theirs *but to reason why*.

Dalmain claims that 'The tone and action were all right, and I doubt whether many of the audience noticed anything wrong with the words.'<sup>197</sup> This anecdote indicates a continuing presence of Tennyson's work at concerts in the 1900s; Dalmain clearly expects some of his contemporaries (if not the audience in the theatre) to know the poem well enough to notice the mistake. The other main characters in the novel, Jane Champion and Doctor Brand, are also happy to quote Tennyson to each other. On the lie which she tells Garth as she rejects his advances, Jane says that 'It was one of those dreadful lies which are "part a truth," of which Tennyson says that they are "a harder matter to fight".' Doctor Brand replies by quoting the lines from 'The Grandmother' to which Jane is alluding, which are treated as a truism voiced in a well-known quotation, and they are of some relevance to the plot of the novel; both concern marriage and the unhappy romantic consequences of lies.<sup>198</sup> The atmosphere of the initial scenes

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<sup>196</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., pp. 169-170.

of the novel is faintly Tennysonian, and even resembles poetry in its structure of one-line paragraphs:

The shadows silently lengthened on the lawn.

The home-coming rooks circled and cawed around the tall  
elm trees.

The sundial pointed to six o'clock.<sup>199</sup>

The use of the word 'caw' is evocative of the 'birds in the high hall-garden' in 'Maud', as there is an echo of the sound of 'caw' in 'Maud'.<sup>200</sup> The first sentence also feels inspired by Tennyson – 'the long light shakes across the lakes' from *The Princess* is suggested, through the similarity of the images and the alliteration of both 'l' and 's' sounds, as is the line 'By night we lingered on the lawn' from *In Memoriam*, thanks to the correspondence of the syllable patterns at the end of each line.<sup>201</sup>

### Tennyson and the Young Modernists

It is interesting that this is a definitely romanticised vision of England, in a book which was an enormous success in America, and Tennyson is still seen as central. It seems that the poet was not seen as having lost his appeal for readers, who would be expected to have an at least passing familiarity with his work, and

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<sup>199</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>200</sup> 'Maud' XII.i, line 412, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1061.

<sup>201</sup> *The Princess* III.iv, line 3, ibid., p. 783; *In Memoriam* XCV lines 1, ibid., p. 945.

that the British upper classes were still seen by some as existing in a 'Tennysonian' world. In the work of younger, more progressive authors, Tennyson's presence is also apparent. James Joyce and T. S. Eliot, who would go on to become two of the dominant figures in the modernist movement and, indeed, in twentieth-century literature in English, published their first verse in the 1900s. Their earliest work is worth considering here because, in places, both writers clearly draw on Tennyson. Joyce's early years as an aspiring man of letters are familiar to readers from the fictionalised version of his life included in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*. But one of the most overlooked facts about Joyce is that he began his literary career as a poet.

The inspiration for 'stately, plump Buck Mulligan', whose shaving ritual opens *Ulysses*, was Oliver St John Gogarty, who said in an interview about Joyce that the novelist's early poems were 'Tennysonian, exquisite things': Gogarty quotes this example from *Chamber Music*, Joyce's only serious collection of poetry, which was published in 1907:

My love is in a light attire  
Among the apple trees  
Where the young winds do most desire  
To run in companies.<sup>202</sup>

These lines are heavily reminiscent of Tennyson's early love poems like 'The May Queen', in terms of their focus on rural scenes of young love affairs, and

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<sup>202</sup> Oliver St John Gogarty, 'James Joyce: A Portrait of the Artist', in *James Joyce: Interviews and Recollections* ed. E.H. Mikhail (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 22.

also because of the immediately noticeable metre. This early debt to Tennyson is admitted in an autobiographical passage in Joyce's last novel, *Finnegans Wake*, where the novelist (under the name 'Osti-Fosti') says that his poetic career 'began Tuonisonian'.<sup>203</sup> The altered spelling with its rolling repetition of heavy 'o' sounds highlights the musicality of Joyce's work, as well as that of Tennyson, uniting two very different writers.

T. S. Eliot published his first poem, 'Song', in the *Harvard Advocate* in May 1907. It consists of two stanzas:

When we came across the hill

No leaves were fallen from the trees;

The gentle fingers of the breeze

Had torn no quivering cobweb down.

The hedgerow bloomed with flowers still

No withered petals lay beneath;

But the wild roses in your wreath

Were faded, and the leaves were brown.<sup>204</sup>

Not only does this follow the same iambic tetrameter form as *In Memoriam*, but Eliot even reproduces Tennyson's indented second and third lines, while altering the rhyme scheme from ABBA to ABBC ADDC. Both poems are concerned with

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<sup>203</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 48.

<sup>204</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Song', *The Undergraduate Poems of T. S. Eliot* (Harvard: Harvard Advocate, 1949), p. 1.

memory, with the structure of Tennyson's poem focused on the discrepancy between the pain of the present and the happiness of the past. Although the sentiment behind Eliot's poem can be identified in *In Memoriam*, his work is only concerned with recognising the signs of loss and destruction in an ostensibly happy moment.<sup>205</sup>

Eliot maintained the gloomy atmosphere of 'Song' in the later 'Circe's Palace', which was published in 1908 in the *Harvard Advocate*. This is loosely connected to Tennyson in terms of its subject matter – one of Tennyson's most accomplished poems being the dramatic monologue 'Ulysses', whose speaker lost many of his men to Circe, and who could conceivably be the narrator of Eliot's poem as well. The narrator sees the flowers at the palace as horrific:

Their petals are fanged and red  
With hideous streak and stain<sup>206</sup>

There is an echo here of Tennyson's idea of 'Nature red in tooth and claw', voiced in *In Memoriam*.<sup>207</sup> Tennyson's phrase was inspired by his reading of Lyall, whose ideas on geology hinted at a struggle for survival which would later be expanded on by Darwin. Eliot identifies with the idea, by using similar words to describe the pre-Christian world of Greek myth. His verses gain in power if we think of the reason behind the 'hideous streak and stain' – the fact that this is a

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<sup>205</sup> It is worth bearing this apparent discrepancy in mind when we come to Eliot's 1936 essay on *In Memoriam*, where he claims that 'Its faith is a poor thing, but its doubt is a very intense experience'. T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction' to *Poems of Tennyson* (London: Nelson, 1936), p. xviii.

<sup>206</sup> 'Circe's Palace', *The Undergraduate Poems of T.S. Eliot*, p. 3.

<sup>207</sup> 'In Memoriam' LVI line 15, in *The Poems of Tennyson*, p.912.

landscape of death, where evolution has been reversed and men have been turned back into animals. The Tennysonian echoes continue in Eliot's poem:

The peacocks walk, stately and slow,  
And they look at us with the eyes  
Of men whom we knew long ago.<sup>208</sup>

One of English poetry's most famous peacocks can be found in a lyric from *The Princess*, 'Now droops the milkwhite peacock like a ghost'.<sup>209</sup> In Eliot's poem the animals are explicitly linked to the loss of human companions, as they more literally remind the narrator of the friends he has lost to Circe's spells. And on a similarly literal level, the phrase 'of men whom we knew long ago' echoes 'the great Achilles, whom we knew' in Tennyson's 'Ulysses'.<sup>210</sup> The allusion to the earlier poem makes Eliot's all the more bleak – in that of Tennyson, Ulysses envisages a possible reunion with Achilles in 'the Happy Isles'; the only possible reunion with a former comrade in Eliot's poem is through eye contact with their new incarnations as animals.

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<sup>208</sup> 'Circe's Palace', *The Undergraduate Poems of T.S. Eliot*, p. 3.

<sup>209</sup> *The Princess* VII, line 165, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 834.

<sup>210</sup> 'Ulysses', line 64, *ibid.*, p. 565.

### E. M. Forster and 'the early Victorians'

As we will see, later in his career Eliot took great pains to filter out the Tennysonian inspiration of his poetry, ostensibly reducing the Victorian poet to an object of parody. But in reality Eliot remained heavily indebted to Tennyson as late as the publication of his final poems, *Four Quartets*. The evidence of Eliot's and Joyce's early poetry suggests that the Modernist 'reaction against Tennyson', in which they both played a part, was based less on a genuine lack of understanding of Tennyson's merits than on specific reasons of cultural prestige, on the establishment of a 'new generation' whose work appeared radically new, even if it actually contained many allusions to the work of an earlier generation. The struggle between these generations is a dominant theme in the 1908 novel *A Room with a View* by E. M. Forster, who in the twenty-first century has been seen by some critics as a proto-Modernist novelist.<sup>211</sup> The initial setting for the novel – a guest-house in Florence – is clearly a remnant of the Victorian era. As Lucy Honeychurch sits to dinner, she looks at 'the portraits of the late Queen and the late Poet Laureate that hung behind the English people, heavily framed.'<sup>212</sup> The two portraits link Tennyson and Victoria as symbols of the older characters in the book, who represent a world order that is fading away. There are several incidents in the novel which highlight the discrepancy between the two generations. Early in the story, Lucy's aunt, Charlotte Bartlett, reports a conversation at dinner in the guest-house, where the novelist Miss Lavish spends

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<sup>211</sup> See, for example, *E. M. Forster's Modernism* by David Medalie (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

<sup>212</sup> E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View* ed. Oliver Stallybrass (London: Edward Arnold, 1977), p. 2.



much of the meal trying to 'prove that England, our great and beloved country, rests on nothing but commerce.'<sup>213</sup> Such a suggestion enrages a fellow diner, Teresa, so much that she leaves the meal 'before the cheese', and on the way points to 'that beautiful picture of Lord Tennyson', saying that the poet 'can confute' Miss Lavish's ideas 'better than I'.<sup>214</sup> Miss Lavish responds, 'Tut! The early Victorians.'<sup>215</sup> This provokes Charlotte enough to respond, 'Miss Lavish, I am an early Victorian; at least, that is to say, I will hear no breath of censure against our dear Queen.'<sup>216</sup> Although she finds that it is 'horrible speaking', she is able to remind Miss Lavish 'how the Queen had been to Ireland when she did not want to go', a defence of the Queen which apparently leaves Miss Lavish 'dumbfounded'.<sup>217</sup> However, the indignity perceived in this conversation is not as shocking, in the world of the novel, as the earlier encounter between Charlotte, Lucy, and Mr. Emerson, who is also staying in the pension and offers to exchange rooms with them, as his has a view. Although this appears a chivalrous thing to do, it is in fact considered forward and improper. That the effect of this offer has lingered is clear from the description of the end of the dinner argument, where Mr. Emerson 'unluckily' overhears Charlotte's praise of Victoria's decision to go to Ireland and agrees, saying 'Quite so, quite so! I honour the woman for her Irish visit.'<sup>218</sup> It is not the sentiment which offends, but the phrase 'the woman', which is repeated and emphasised by Charlotte.

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., p. 35. The sentiment is one hinted at in 'Maud'.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid.

<sup>216</sup> Ibid.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., pp. 35-6.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

That the ideals of the world of the upper-class, older characters are being replaced is clear from Lucy's eventual choice of husband – she chooses the lower-class but passionate George Emerson over Cecil Vyse, who although the social superior of Emerson, is cold, pretentious, and unappealing. This is clear from the contrasting courtship techniques of the two young men. While Emerson kisses Lucy after only knowing her for a few days, Cecil quotes Tennyson to her:

Lucy had not attended either. Her brow was wrinkled, and she still looked furiously cross – the result, he concluded, of too much moral gymnastics. It was sad to see her thus blind to the beauties of an August wood.

‘Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height,’ he quoted, and touched her knee with his own.

She flushed again and said: ‘What height?’

‘Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height:

What pleasure lives in height (the shepherd sang),

In height and in the splendour of the hills?’<sup>219</sup>

Although there is physical contact in this scene, it is not as clearly eroticised as the earlier kiss, and the quotation of poetry appears outdated as a method of courtship, at least in its effect on Lucy. Tennyson is clearly less well-known than Cecil thinks, as she either does not recognise the lines or chooses not to. In either case, his courtship has failed to move her.

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<sup>219</sup> Ibid., p. 100.

This is not a simple case of the poet no longer having any merits, as an extended passage earlier in the novel on the ideal 'medieval lady' shows:

There is much that is immortal in this medieval lady. The dragons have gone, and so have the knights, but still she lingers in our midst. She reigned in many an early Victorian castle, and was queen of much early Victorian song. It is sweet to protect her in the intervals of business, sweet to pay her honour when she has cooked our dinner well. But alas! the creature grows degenerate. In her heart also there are springing up strange desires. She too is enamoured of heavy winds, and vast panoramas, and green expanses of the sea.<sup>220</sup>

While the image of a passive Arthurian heroine whom Forster associates with 'early Victorian song' still has resonance – indeed 'there is much that is immortal' in the image – it is clear from Lucy's reactions to Vyse and Emerson that she cannot live up to the pure image represented in this novel by Tennyson, who stands for all the 'early Victorians'.<sup>221</sup> Lucy clearly 'does not stand for the medieval lady, who was rather an ideal to which she was bidden to lift her eyes when feeling serious.'<sup>222</sup> Forster does not specify by whom 'she was bidden' to look to this ideal of womanhood, but it is clear that the idea is ludicrous, and that Lucy, the modern young woman, will never live up to this stereotype of female

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<sup>220</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>221</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

virtue in the twentieth century. If not all of Tennyson's output is specifically criticised here, it seems clear this 'ideal' – a Victorian rather than truly medieval one – can be usefully associated with his *Idylls*.

### Growing Degenerate: Criticism in the late 1900s

The iconoclasm of Forster's image – the idealised woman of pre-Raphaelite painting and Tennysonian poetry 'growing degenerate' – is echoed in the manner in which the poetry of Tennyson was discussed in some literary journals, particularly as the decade wore on. Events that would have been described in hushed, polite tones years earlier were now material for at least sardonic, if not sarcastic, comment. The clearest example of this was the unveiling of the statue of Tennyson at Lincoln Cathedral in 1905. This was designed by G. F. Watts, who died before he could see it erected, and depicts Tennyson examining a small plant which he holds in the palm of his hand, as described in the short poem 'Flower in the Crannied Wall' which is reprinted on an iron plaque at the statue's base. The statue is rough in texture, the chiselling almost impressionistic, but it is undoubtedly a good likeness, the poet accompanied by his favourite dog. The unveiling was widely reported in the press, the most interesting report appearing in the *Athenaeum*. While the reporter notes that 'The prevailing sense among those present was of veneration and reverence, a sense which the environment, the age of the sculptor, and that of the subject to the monument were alike calculated to foster', he writes, 'It savours, perhaps,

somewhat of irreverence to say that from a distance the effect is rather that of one consulting a watch.<sup>223</sup>

This might seem like a flippant comment, and yet not only is it a fairly accurate description of the statue, it also registers a shift in the way in which Tennyson could be described – reporters and critics could write about the great Victorian poet in non-satirical publications and include jokes. This reverent mockery also appears in the writing of G. K. Chesterton. In a 1904 book on G. F. Watts, Chesterton had noted of the statue that ‘There is something very characteristic of Watts in the contrast between the colossal plan of the figure and the smallness of the central object’.<sup>224</sup> In the same volume he also described Watts’s portraits of the two poets thus: ‘the head of Browning is the head of a strong, splendid, joyful and anxious man who could write magnificent poetry. The head of Tennyson is the head of a poet.’<sup>225</sup> However, this essential difference (which Henry James would later note in his autobiography, *The Middle Years*) is countered by the similarity Chesterton identifies between the two poets, who were brought together:

it must be supposed, by the one thing that they had really in common, a profound belief in the solemnity, the ceremoniousness, the responsibility and what most men would now, in all probability, call the pomposity of the great arts.<sup>226</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> ‘The Lincoln Monument to Tennyson’, *The Athenaeum* 4057 (29 July 1905), p. 145.

<sup>224</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *G. F. Watts* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1920; first published 1904), p. 74.

<sup>225</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid.*

This is fairly respectful, and yet critics in the 1900s were often rather more outspoken about Tennyson's perceived solemnity, ceremoniousness and pomposity than Chesterton, and nowhere more so than when writing about *The Princess*. Although the issue of women's suffrage was very important at the time, the ideas about it expressed in *The Princess*, while progressive for the 1840s, were unlikely to retain their appeal in the 1900s. Eugene Parsons, introducing an edition of Tennyson's works in 1900, wrote that *The Princess* 'does not bear the test of re-reading. One becomes at last cloyed with its gorgeous style, overloaded as it is with glittering conceits and ornate commonplaces.'<sup>227</sup> John Churton Collins agreed in 1902, saying that the poem 'has done its work', as 'the problem [of women's education] which was unsolved when the poem appeared has long found its solution.'<sup>228</sup> However, the quality of the lyrics in the poem, which could stand alone free of the context of the longer narrative, ensured that extracts from *The Princess* occupied a sizeable part of most selections of Tennyson in the period, and, as we have seen, they were often quoted in fiction written in the 1900s.

If *The Princess* was generally disliked in the period, the merits of the *Idylls of the King* were much more contested. G. C. Allen, in the introduction to a series of prose retellings of Tennyson's poems, wrote that in the *Idylls* Tennyson 'has reduced to law and order and coherency the desultory and often wearisome compilations of the earlier writers, and has given the story of Arthur an epic unity,

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<sup>227</sup> Eugene Parsons, introduction to *The Poetical Works of Alfred, Lord Tennyson, Poet Laureate* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell & Co., 1900), p. x.

<sup>228</sup> John Churton Collins, introduction to *The Princess* in *In Memoriam, The Princess, and Maud* (London: Methuen & Co., 1902), p. 153.

a spiritual significance, and a moral purpose.<sup>229</sup> And yet many critics in the early 1900s disagreed over the merits of these poems. The Italian critic Gaetano Negri wrote in 1904 that the *Idylls* contain poetry 'of too great artifice' which renders them unreadable 'unless they are viewed as a literary curiosity.'<sup>230</sup> His sentiments were echoed by an anonymous reviewer in the *Athenaeum* in 1902, who believed that 'Tennyson has bungled his Arthur between the ancient and the modern conception of manhood in its relations to self-advertisement and the other sex.'<sup>231</sup>

G. K. Chesterton was equally unsure about the *Idylls*. In a 1903 essay on the poet, he claimed that:

He felt that the time called him to be an interpreter. Perhaps he might have been something more of a poet if he had not sought to be something more than a poet. He might have written a more perfect Arthurian epic if his heart had been as much buried in pre-historic sepulchres as the heart of Mr. W. B. Yeats.<sup>232</sup>

As Chesterton was generally very accepting of the leading figures of the Victorian age, it is interesting to see him specifically view a living poet as superior to Tennyson. And the opinions (first voiced in the 1870s) of another perceptive critic

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<sup>229</sup> G. C. Allen, introduction to *Tales From Tennyson* (Westminster: Archibald Constable & Co., 1900), p. x.

<sup>230</sup> Gaetano Negri, *Ultimi Saggi: Problemi di Religione, di Politica e di Letteratura* (Milano: Ulrico Hoepli, 1904), p. 245. My translation of 'qualche cosa di tanto artificioso, [...] che mi par davvero non possano esser letti se non come curiosità letteraria'.

<sup>231</sup> Review of *English Men of Letters – Tennyson* by Sir Alfred Lyall and Alfred, Lord Tennyson: *Works*, *The Athenaeum* 3912 (18<sup>th</sup> October 1902), p. 514.

<sup>232</sup> G. K. Chesterton, 'Tennyson', in Richard Garnett and G. K. Chesterton, *Tennyson* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1903), p. 8.

of Tennyson, Henry James, were reprinted in 1908, in which he voiced reservations. In an essay on 'Queen Mary', first published in 1875, James gives an account of the negative aspects of *Idylls of the King*:

That King Arthur [...] is rather a prig, and that he couldn't have been all the poet represents him to be without being a good deal of a hypocrite; that the poet himself is too monotonously unctuous, and that in relating the misdeeds of Launcelot and Guinevere he seems, like the lady in the play in 'Hamlet', to 'protest too much' for wholesomeness – all this has been often said, and said with abundant force.<sup>233</sup>

This did not stop James from repeating these criticism, and indeed reservations over the *Idylls* were becoming increasingly common in criticism of Tennyson. Arthur Quiller-Couch, in the introduction to a 1909 edition of Tennyson, wrote that 'one may pretty safely prophesy that, as time goes on, even thick-and-thin Tennysonians will remove their stress of admiration from the "Idylls" to lay it more and more upon "In Memoriam" as Tennyson's masterpiece.'<sup>234</sup> This is possibly influenced by the writings of A. C. Bradley, whose 1901 study of *In Memoriam* cast a shadow over Tennyson studies in the decade, and who finished the 1900s by claiming that 'in spite of countless beauties, the total result of the *Idylls* was disappointing, not merely from the defects of this or that poem, but because the

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<sup>233</sup> Henry James, 'Queen Mary', *Views and Reviews* (Boston: The Ball Publishing Company, 1908), p. 177.

<sup>234</sup> Arthur Quiller-Couch, Introduction to *Tennyson's Poems: A Selection* (London: Cassell and Company, 1904), p. 9.



old unity of spirit and story was broken up, and the new was neither equal to the old nor complete in itself.<sup>235</sup> This is part of a sustained effort to show that the long poem as a genre is close to 'doomed', and Bradley takes great pains in a footnote to distance himself from other detractors of Tennyson.<sup>236</sup> James himself identifies a way around these problems, albeit in a judgement that is itself limiting, suggesting that if the reader does not think about the moralizing aspects of the work, but surrenders his sense to 'their perfect picturesqueness, it is the most charming poetry in the world.'<sup>237</sup>

Two years after Bradley's book on *In Memoriam* appeared, P. G. Wodehouse, who was just starting out in his career, voiced a note of caution about 'guidebooks' to works of literature. In the 'Notes' to *Tales of St. Austin's*, he wrote:

How often have we been forced to take down from dictation the miserable maunderings of some commentator on the subject of *Maud*. A person reads *Maud*, and either likes or dislikes it. In any case his opinion is not likely to be influenced by writing down at express speed the opinions of somebody else concerning the methods or objectivity and subjectivity of the author when he produced the work.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>235</sup> A .C. Bradley, 'The Long Poem in the Age of Wordsworth', *Oxford Lectures on Poetry* (London: Macmilan & Co., 1909), p. 193. One should note that the loss of the 'old unity of spirit and story' is also the fate of the Round Table in the *Idylls*.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., p. 204; *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>237</sup> James, *Views and Reviews*, p. 178.

<sup>238</sup> P.G. Wodehouse, 'Notes', *Tales of St. Austin's* (London: Adam & Charles Black, 1903), p. 260.

Wodehouse is being facetious here, and yet his comments, which appear in a book of school stories designed to appeal, in the main, to school children, are clearly intended to chime with real classroom experiences. By the 1900s, it seems, Tennyson was an integral part of a private school education.

Wodehouse's complaint about interpreters of 'Maud' might not be a specific criticism of the poem, but there is no doubt that the critical fortunes of Tennyson's monodrama were on the wane by 1900. Lewis Edwards Gates believed that

The whole poem is the overwrought, half-frenzied dream of a mind diseased, – the mind of the hero, whose ideas and feelings and fancies make up the substance of the poem, and through whose eyes and morbid temperament we are continually forced to look at whatever happens.<sup>239</sup>

Although this could be seen simply as a description of the poem, the vocabulary used – in particular 'forced to look at' – indicates that the reviewer is not entirely happy with the monodramatic form. Arthur Waugh went further than this in an edition of *Maud and Other Poems* published in 1905, where the poem is criticised because the narrator 'does undoubtedly protest too much; there is something positively painful, something foreign to the true nature of poetry, in the violent

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<sup>239</sup> Lewis Edwards Gates, 'Tennyson's Relation to Common Life', *Studies and Appreciations* (New York: Macmillan, 1900), p. 69.

diatribes that begin the poem and end the second part.<sup>240</sup> If Waugh, a critic whose fame was built on his 1892 biography of Tennyson, could see something 'foreign to the true nature of poetry' in 'Maud' then it is clear that time had been less kind to the poem than others in Tennyson's *oeuvre*.

Despite the reservations voiced about so much of Tennyson's work in the 1900s, in 1909, the newspapers and journals commemorated the centenary of Tennyson's birth in some detail. The correspondent for the *Times* believed that the 'Tennyson Centenary Exhibition' at the Fine Arts Society would 'revive many a happy memory in the older generation, and will give pleasure to many a younger lover of poetry.'<sup>241</sup> The correspondent did, however, note that 'the new poets and critics of to-day give their admiration elsewhere', as a result of a reaction which apparently started around 1870. And the article ends by bemoaning this apparent lack of appeal to the new generation of poets, saying 'Tennyson is a classic, known by heart to many and revered by more.'<sup>242</sup> The most ringing endorsements came from critics who were similarly overtly sympathetic to the Victorian period. T. Herbert Warren, in a lecture delivered to Oxford University extension students, expressed the conviction that Tennyson was 'for the Victorian Age, in its later phase, a poet of Empire, even as Shakespeare was a poet of Elizabethan expansion, triumph, and adventure.'<sup>243</sup> Although Warren makes some important points, not least that the poet's 'powers as a critical scholar and a scientific thinker and a metaphysical philosopher have

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<sup>240</sup> Arthur Waugh, introduction to *Maud and Other Poems* (London: William Heinemann, 1905), p. viii.

<sup>241</sup> 'Tennyson Centenary Exhibition', *The Times* 39001 (2<sup>nd</sup> July 1909), p. 8.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>243</sup> T. Herbert Warren, *The Centenary of Tennyson 1809-1909* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1909), p. 6.

been underrated,' the syntax of the piece as it goes on is tentative and difficult; it seems to reflect the speaker's uncertainty about the possibility of Tennyson finding a sympathetic audience a century after his death.<sup>244</sup> Warren continues:

He was the voice of the Victorian era, and those who wish to know  
what that voice was, even if it has, amid the new aspirations of  
another century, but a faint appeal to them, though to my mind, and  
I believe to that of many, his message is still potent and  
unexhausted, must go to him to learn it.<sup>245</sup>

Poems published in America for the centenary echo Warren's sentiments.

Ambrose Bierce wrote a fierce poem to any 'affronting fool' who dares to criticise Tennyson, and also published a poem entitled 'After Tennyson', with a similarly strident tone which is characterised by its copious quotations, however unsuitable, from Tennyson's poems (It starts 'You ask me why, though ill at ease', the first line of a poem from the 1842 collection).<sup>246</sup>

However, many of the retrospective views published on the occasion of his centenary were less clear-cut about his relevance. In the journal *The Nineteenth Century and After*, Frederic Harrison opined that 'Tennyson will hold rank with the best poets of the nineteenth century; but he is certainly not in any class above them.'<sup>247</sup> This is substantially different from the idea of a trinity of

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<sup>244</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>245</sup> Ibid., pp. 29-30.

<sup>246</sup> Ambrose Bierce, 'To a Critic of Tennyson', *The Collected Works of Ambrose Bierce Volume IV: Shapes of Clay* (New York: Neale Publishing Co., 1910), p. 367; 'After Tennyson', ibid, p. 105.

<sup>247</sup> Frederic Harrison, 'The Tennyson Centenary', *The Nineteenth Century and After* 66 (August 1909), p. 228.

Tennyson, Milton and Shakespeare that was being put forward by critics in 1892. For Harrison, Tennyson might still be one of the foremost poets of the century, but he 'wants the intellectual force of Byron and the intellectual distinction of Shelley.'<sup>248</sup> This general affection, tempered by a definite acknowledgment of a depreciation in importance, is the dominant attitude displayed towards Tennyson in 1909. It is found in Quiller-Couch's introduction to the poet, where we have already seen the emerging critic and anthologist preferring *In Memoriam* to the *Idylls*, and even the former is not spared from Quiller-Couch's criticism, as it 'seems to promise more than it performs'.<sup>249</sup> Thomas Seccombe voiced a similar opinion, as for him Tennyson's work represents 'perfect achievement within limits', which he says is not enough for the 'new age', which 'clamours for marginalia' when presented with 'a finely printed page'.<sup>250</sup> This 'limitation' is also observed by Laurie Magnus, who in *English Literature in the Nineteenth Century* states that 'as he never fell below, so he never rose above himself', a key factor behind the 'non-contagion, the less than fully possessive power, of the dramas, the *Idylls of the King*, and even of *In Memoriam*'.<sup>251</sup>

Perhaps the most powerful and important article (thanks to its place of publication) published about the poet in 1909 can be found in the *Times Literary Supplement* of August 5, where Walter de la Mare had a long lead essay about the poet printed (anonymously) on the front page. In this article he speaks of his 'incredulity' at its being Tennyson's centenary, as his 'poetry and presence' are

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<sup>248</sup> Ibid., p. 230.

<sup>249</sup> Quiller-Couch, 'Introduction' to *Tennyson's Poems: A Selection*, p. 10.

<sup>250</sup> Thomas Seccombe, 'A Word about Tennyson', *The Readers' Review* 2.20 (September 1909), p. 125.

<sup>251</sup> Laurie Magnus, *English Literature in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Andrew Melrose, 1909), p. 241.

'so clear and fresh and contemporary in the minds of even the younger generation.'<sup>252</sup> He notes that the poet 'is a master of the magic word', and calls the third stanza of 'Crossing the Bar' 'perhaps, the most gravely beautiful in English poetry'.<sup>253</sup> Ultimately, de la Mare believes that Tennyson was in touch with the modern world, which helped secure him a place 'as one of the great traditions of Victorian England'.<sup>254</sup> However, the article is not without humour or criticism. De la Mare sides with Edward FitzGerald in believing the 1842 volumes to be 'the most enduring fraction of his work', and asks of his characters whether 'they ever evoke in us that hidden self which seldom stirs but never sleeps beneath life's restless consciousness'.<sup>255</sup> His description of the poet is less than reverent:

Peculiarly impressive, rough-hewn, downright manliness was the outstanding feature of this humorous 'grumpy' poet, who left his hair to the chance barbering of his candle; who answered a flattering and formidable invitation to breakfast with contemporary demigods with a brusque, 'I should hate it, Duchess'; who, eager to shine his brightest, could think of nothing but beer to talk about to Robertson of Brighton; who chanted his 'hollow oes and aes' with a 'voice like the sound of a far sea or of a pinewood' out of a cloud of

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<sup>252</sup> Walter de la Mare, 'Tennyson', *Times Literary Supplement* 395 (5<sup>th</sup> August 1909), p. 1.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

<sup>254</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

tobacco smoke to any old crony that would listen to the poems  
scribbled down in that historical butcher's book.<sup>256</sup>

This portrait of Tennyson, while unfair (and influenced by accounts of his American equivalent, in terms of national significance, Walt Whitman), has clearly built up as a result of the flood of autobiographies and biographies containing anecdotes of meetings with Tennyson which proliferated in the period between 1890 and 1909. The picture presented by de la Mare endured until the late 1940s with the appearance of genuinely insightful biographical material from the pen of Charles Tennyson, the poet's grandson.

As this article highlights various trends in Tennyson criticism which prevailed in the 1900s it seems fair to give de la Mare the final word on a decade in which Tennyson's reputation declined a little in public discussion, but which saw relatively few artistic engagements with his work. As de la Mare says, English poetry (and, we can add, literature in general) 'has floated out beyond the Tennysonian tradition', and 'is little influenced by, if not actually antagonistic to, the ideals of the Victorian age.'<sup>257</sup> One could assume that as the age grew more remote, Tennyson's importance in English literature would decrease further, in a relatively peaceful manner. But events of the 1910s, as well as the literature of that period, prove such a conclusion short-sighted.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

## Chapter Four

### The 1910s

In 1911, the most influential English novelist was Arnold Bennett. The second of his *Clayhanger* trilogy, *Hilda Lessways* (which is initially set in 1878 and deals with events up to the turn of the century), features a heroine who possesses ‘the most precious of all faculties, the power to feel intensely’.<sup>258</sup> This strength of feeling leads her away from her mother’s influence, as represented by a book she had held dear in childhood, *The Girl’s Week-Day Book*, which contains advice for young girls on how to conduct themselves: ‘A book representing, for Hilda, all that was most grotesque in an age that was now definitely finished and closed! A silly book!’<sup>259</sup> She much prefers the work of Tennyson. Turnhill, where Hilda grew up, has neither a lending library nor a municipal library, and *Maud, and Other Poems*, which Hilda requested for an early birthday, had to be ordered by her mother on a trip to the neighbouring town of Oldcastle and be sent from London. With books so difficult to get hold of, ‘Hilda could not easily demand the gift of another book, when all sorts of nice, really useful presents could be bought in the High Street.’<sup>260</sup> But Tennyson has her in raptures:

Dangerous the book was! Once in reciting it aloud in her room,

Hilda had come so near to fainting that she had to stop and lie

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<sup>258</sup> Arnold Bennett, *Hilda Lessways* (London: Methuen, 1911), p. 8.

<sup>259</sup> *Ibid.*, p.163; From my research, the book is *The Girl’s Week-Day Book* by Mrs. Copley (London: Religious Tract Society, undated).

<sup>260</sup> *Hilda Lessways*, p. 7.



down on the bed, until she could convince herself that she was not the male lover crying to his beloved. An astounding and fearful experience, and not to be too lightly renewed! For Hilda, *Maud* was a source of lovely and exquisite pain.<sup>261</sup>

Hilda's passion for 'Maud' subsides somewhat once she enters adulthood. While visiting the Orgreaves, who are family friends, she is asked to recite some Tennyson, and mutters, 'Tennyson? I've forgotten "Maud"'.<sup>262</sup> Her hosts are politely insistent, and Tom Orgreave 'went to a bookcase and drew forth a green volume, familiar and sacred throughout all England'.<sup>263</sup> Her performance, which initially falters, is a success, and makes the family watch her 'with an extreme intentness'.<sup>264</sup> The family are clearly admirers of Tennyson – Hilda discovers Charlie, also present at the party, reading *In Memoriam* because 'it's rather on the religious tack'.<sup>265</sup>

Hilda eventually goes to manage a guest-house in Brighton and marries the wrong man (a bigamist); however, the book ends with her union with Edwin Clayhanger. As they walk, he tells her about the theatre in Bursley:

'They used to call it the Blood Tub [...] Melodrama and murder and gore – you know.'

She exclaimed in horror. 'Why are people like that in the Five Towns?'

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<sup>261</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>262</sup> Ibid., p. 177.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>264</sup> Ibid.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., p. 179.

'It's our form of poetry, I suppose,' said he.<sup>266</sup>

Soon after, Hilda tells him that this has 'quite altered my notion of poetry', and her near-immediate agreement indicates that Edwin's view of the poetry of the Five Towns is very similar to that of Bennett himself.<sup>267</sup> The form of art Edwin is advocating – 'melodrama and murder and gore' – seems close to parts of 'Maud', not least the following lines:

I hate the dreadful hollow behind the little wood,  
Its lips in the field above are dabbled with blood-red heath,  
The red-ribbed ledges drip with a silent horror of blood,  
And Echo there, whatever is asked her, answers 'Death'.<sup>268</sup>

Bennett's serious fiction – as opposed to the books and stories he wrote purely for money – owed its style to French realist fiction such as that of Emile Zola.<sup>269</sup> The desire for a faithful representation of everyday life means that *Hilda Lessways* tells us a lot about the attitude of young adults towards Tennyson near the end of the nineteenth century. Yet as one of Arnold Bennett's literary novels (he also wrote very lucrative magazine fiction), it must also have been intended to have some bearing on the world of 1911. This appears to be maintained across the Atlantic, as the American writer Owen Wister cited *In Memoriam* in the

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<sup>266</sup> Ibid., p. 388.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., p. 394.

<sup>268</sup> 'Maud' l.l.i lines 1-4, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p.1041.

<sup>269</sup> Identified as early as 1902 by W. H. Alden, in a review of *Anna of the Five Towns* for the *New York Times*. Quoted in *Arnold Bennett: The Critical Heritage* ed. James Hepburn (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 662.

preface to his 1911 collection *Members of the Family*, writing about the 'rush of change' in American culture in the mid-nineteenth century: 'The driving of that golden spike which riveted the rails between New York and San Francisco, rang out the old, rang in the new, and progress began to work its magic-lantern faster.'<sup>270</sup>

Wister's compatriot Edwin Watts Chubb, writing three years later, was confident enough of Tennyson's continuing importance to proclaim him one of the 'masters of English literature',

it is not improbable that a thousand years hence the inquisitive reader of the history of thought in the early part of the nineteenth century will turn to *In Memoriam* for an understanding of that controversial period rather than to the formal records and histories of science.<sup>271</sup>

But critics writing about Tennyson in the period were often cautious in their assessments of his merits. Edmund Gosse, by this point a voice of the literary establishment, remarked in 1913 that 'Tennyson is now suffering from the extravagant obsequiousness of his late Victorian admirers', and observed disparagingly the 'unrestrained panegyric which took the place of the higher

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<sup>270</sup> Owen Wister, 'Preface' to *Members of the Family: More Stories of the Virginian* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1911), p. 10.

<sup>271</sup> Edwin Watts Chubb, *Masters of English Literature* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1967, first pub. 1914), p.411. The other 'Masters' are Chaucer, Shakespeare, Milton, Dryden, Swift, Pope, Johnson, Burns, Byron, Shelley, Keats, Wordsworth, Scott, Dickens, Thackeray, George Eliot, Carlyle, Ruskin, and Browning.

criticism of Tennyson in the closing years of the nineteenth century'.<sup>272</sup> There appeared to be a movement towards Browning and away from Tennyson, on account of the more 'modern'-seeming versification of the former. This is evinced in G. H. Mair's *English Literature: Modern*, which first appeared in 1911 and was then expanded and reprinted several times: 'While Tennyson, in his own special way and, so to speak, in collaboration with the spirit of the age, was carrying on the work of Romanticism on its normal lines, Browning was finding a new style and a new subject matter.'<sup>273</sup> The ageing, but still prolific, Liberal critic Frederic Harrison believed that in 1912 Tennyson's poems belonged 'exclusively to English homes, rectories, colleges, and cathedral closes – [they] are eminently local, insular, and academic. [...] [I]t is only in the Fellows' common-room and in country parsonages that Tennyson is still held to be the typical poet of the nineteenth century'.<sup>274</sup> Even a writer as sympathetic to the Victorian age as G. K. Chesterton believed Browning to be superior: 'Browning is the Englishman taking himself wilfully, following his nose like a bull-dog, going by his own likes and dislikes. We cannot help feeling that Tennyson is the Englishman taking himself seriously – an awful sight.'<sup>275</sup> Chesterton's main concern was that Tennyson 'could not keep priggishness out of long poems.'<sup>276</sup> And in a review of Hallam Tennyson's edition of the poet's *Complete Works* in *The Academy* we read:

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<sup>272</sup> Edmund Gosse, 'A First Sight of Tennyson', *Portraits and Sketches* (London: William Heinemann, 1913), p.130; *ibid.*, p. 129.

<sup>273</sup> G. H. Mair, *English Literature: Modern* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1911), p. 201.

<sup>274</sup> Frederic Harrison, *Among My Books* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1912), p. 291.

<sup>275</sup> G. K. Chesterton, *The Victorian Age in Literature* (London: Williams & Norgate, 1913), p. 163.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 167.

It is ironic that the moment when an author receives the honour of "Complete Works" should so often synchronise with the necessity for a carefully selected edition. While we are grateful for a monumental volume we would respectfully offer the hint to Tennyson's keenest admirers; for though we live in a strenuous age, we can still appreciate the drowsy loveliness of a summer's afternoon, and life, seen through the languorous atmosphere of such a time, Tennyson revealed perhaps better than any other English poet.<sup>277</sup>

As we will see, the idea of Tennyson as a welcome, if undemanding, diversion to those who live in a 'strenuous age' recurs in Virginia Woolf's 1927 *A Room of One's Own*.

#### 'The cult of the innocuous': Tennyson and the avant-garde

This apparent turn away from Tennyson was echoed by many avant-garde writers. In 1916, Ezra Pound wrote to Elkin Matthews that a 'serious writer' cannot be 'expected to abandon the tongue of Shakespeare for the meouning [*sic*] of Wordsworth and Al. Tennyson and Mr. Gosse'.<sup>278</sup> In the same year, he observed in a letter to Iris Barry that 'Virgil is a second-rater, a Tennysonianized

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<sup>277</sup> 'The High Priest of Poetry', *The Academy* 2171 (13<sup>th</sup> December 1913), p. 744.

<sup>278</sup> Ezra Pound to Elkin Matthews, c.29 May 1916, in *Pound/Joyce: The Letters of Ezra Pound to James Joyce, with Pound's Essays on Joyce*, ed. Forrest Read (New York: New Directions, 1967), p. 278.

version of Homer'.<sup>279</sup> The idea of the Tennysonian as 'second-rate' fits in with Pound's idea of literature having possessed a 'sense of life' prior to the 'stultifying period of the counter-reformation, or in English in Wordsworth and Tennyson'.<sup>280</sup> In a 1917 essay he claimed that 'the afflatus which has driven great artists to blurt out the facts of life with directness or with cold irony [...] leads Tennyson into pretty embroideries',<sup>281</sup> and in *The Future* in November 1917, he wrote:

The Victorian cult of the innocuous so distressingly interposed itself. One is tired of hearing depreciation of Tennyson, but he is a very convenient example. The 'Spectatorial' mind, whether in press or in schoolroom, has recommended 'safe' poets.<sup>282</sup>

If Pound were truly tired of hearing depreciations of Tennyson, he would not use him as a 'convenient example'; it would appear that Tennyson has become a whipping boy for writers in avant-garde periodicals like *The Future*. T.S. Eliot, in *The Egoist* the following year, demonstrated this, referring to the latter's 'large dull brain, like a farmhouse clock'.<sup>283</sup> At around the same time, in *Poetry*, we find Eliot claiming that Gilbert Murray's modernisation of Euripides was Greek for 'the working-man, at a shilling the play, in the style of fifty years ago – an ideal of

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<sup>279</sup> Ezra Pound to Iris Barry, 20 July 1916, in *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 138.

<sup>280</sup> Ezra Pound to Elkin Mathews, 30 May 1916, *Pound/Joyce*, p. 285.

<sup>281</sup> Ezra Pound, 'The Rev. G. Crabbe, LL.B.', in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), pp. 276-7.

<sup>282</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Landor', *Selected Prose 1909-1965* ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 384.

<sup>283</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Verse Pleasant and Unpleasant', *The Egoist* 5 (1918), p. 43.

socialism and popular education – Greek without tears’.<sup>284</sup> This idea of populism at the expense of genuine art can also be found in a criticism of the *Idylls*, in an *Egoist* essay of the following year, where Eliot says that they sound to him ‘like Tennyson talking to Queen Victoria in Heaven’, and that they are ‘hardly more important than a parody, or a “Chaucer retold for Children”’.<sup>285</sup>

Joyce’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* was serialized in *The Egoist* from 1914 to 1915, and the context of its first publication is interesting, from which one could infer a potential shared set of values. The novel had started as an essay entitled ‘A Portrait of the Artist’, and developed into a long novel called *Stephen Hero*. Joyce was dissatisfied with the latter, and decided in September 1907 to rewrite it completely.<sup>286</sup> Stephen is the ‘hero’ of the earlier book, and the difference between the two lies chiefly in the manner in which events in *A Portrait* are often (but crucially not always) focalised through Stephen, who is presented with more distance from the narrative voice. In *A Portrait*, near the end of his second year at boarding school at Belvedere, Stephen is interrogated by his friend Heron about a female visitor. Heron urges him to ‘Admit!’ before ‘striking him again with his cane across the calf of the leg’.<sup>287</sup> ‘Admit’, the ‘familiar word of admonition’, prompts Stephen to remember two incidents which took place ‘towards the close of his first term in the college’. The first is a ‘public chiding’ over a statement in an essay which his English

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<sup>284</sup> T. S. Eliot, ‘Classics in English’, *Poetry* IX.2 (November 1916), p. 101.

<sup>285</sup> ‘Reflections on Contemporary Poetry’, *The Egoist* IV.10 (November 1917), p.151; T.S. Eliot, ‘Ezra Pound: His Metric and Poetry’, in *Selected Prose* ed. Frank Kermode (London: Faber & Faber, 1975), p. 149.

<sup>286</sup> Richard Ellmann, *James Joyce* (Oxford: OUP, 1983), p.264.

<sup>287</sup> James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Walter Hettche (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), p. 100.

teacher, Mr Tate, considers 'heresy'.<sup>288</sup> This leads him to recall an incident 'a few nights after' the caning when he met his classmates Heron, Boland and Nash in the road.<sup>289</sup> The three begin to boast about 'what books they were reading and how many books there were in their fathers' bookcases at home' (Joyce's miming of the child's thoughts and speech can be seen in the repetition of 'books' in this sentence).<sup>290</sup> Boland then asks Heron 'who is the best poet':

- Lord Tennyson, of course, answered Heron.

- O, yes, Lord Tennyson, said Nash. We have all his poetry at home in a book.

At this point Stephen forgot the silent vows he had been making and burst out:

- Tennyson a poet! Why, he's only a rhymester!

- O, get out! said Heron. Everyone knows that Tennyson is the greatest poet.

- And who do you think is the greatest poet? asked Boland, nudging his neighbour.

- Byron, of course, answered Stephen.<sup>291</sup>

Heron replies, 'Byron the greatest poet! He's only a poet for uneducated people. [...] In any case Byron was a heretic and immoral too'. And the scene ends with

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid., pp. 101-2.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., p. 102.

<sup>290</sup> Ibid.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., pp. 102-3.



Stephen being beaten with a cane and a cabbage stump until he 'admits' that 'Byron was no good'.<sup>292</sup>

If we can assume that Stephen is roughly the same age as Joyce, then this incident would have taken place in 1893, a year after Tennyson's death. It would seem that Stephen represents an early version of the iconoclastic readers and writers of *The Egoist*, who are ready to deny Tennyson the reverence afforded him by the likes of Edwin Watts Chubb. It should also be noted that two months prior to the publication of this passage in *The Egoist*, the journal had carried an appreciative article on Byron by Leonard A. Compton-Rickett.<sup>293</sup> Despite the undoubted irony with which the precocious Stephen is presented here, what this episode in *A Portrait* suggests is that resentment towards Tennyson had, in fact, been building at least since 1892, and possibly even during Tennyson's lifetime, and that writers like the emergent Stephen Dedalus – who by the end of the novel has vowed to 'encounter for the millionth time the reality of experience and to forge in the smithy of my soul the uncreated conscience of my race' – were set finally to contest the dominance of the Victorians.<sup>294</sup>

A similar desire to break free from the influence of the nineteenth century can be found in Virginia Woolf's 1919 novel *Night and Day*. The heroine, Katharine Hilbery, is engaged in writing a biography of her grandfather, Richard Alardyce. He was a Victorian poet considered of sufficient importance to be buried in Westminster Abbey – a picture of his 'tomb in Poets' Corner' hung

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid., p. 104.

<sup>293</sup> Leonard A. Compton-Rickett, 'The Poetry of Byron', *The Egoist* 1.8 (15<sup>th</sup> April 1914), pp.141-3.

<sup>294</sup> *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 282.

above Katharine's 'nursery fireplace'.<sup>295</sup> His burial in Westminster Abbey unites him with Tennyson and Browning as a pre-eminent Victorian poet, and his work appears Keatsian – one of his most famous poems is an 'Ode to Winter'.<sup>296</sup> However, the reasons cited for his pre-eminence unite him with Tennyson. 'In one of those moments of grown-up confidence which are so tremendously impressive to the child's mind', the young Katherine was told that that 'he was buried [in the Abbey] because he was a "good and great man"'.<sup>297</sup> This closely corresponds to the reasons given for Tennyson's fame by obituaries and elegies written on his death in 1892, which concentrated on the man as much as his work: his life was seen as a 'perfect song'.<sup>298</sup>

One of Katherine Hilbery's main occupations is to show guests around her grandfather's studio, guiding them around the relics there assembled; his writing-table, original manuscripts, and personal effects. When a group of Americans visit her house, we find her displaying her grandfather's pen, pausing 'for the right number of seconds' before showing them his manuscripts.<sup>299</sup> Holding the manuscript of Alardyce's 'Ode to Winter' in her hands, one of the guests is suddenly overcome by something she notices through the corner of her eye: 'What! His very own slippers!'<sup>300</sup> She promptly abandons the manuscript: 'she hastily grasped the old shoes, and remained for a moment dumb in contemplation of them'.<sup>301</sup> The guest's preference for such relics fits in with Woolf's ideas about biography – the slippers show Alardyce as a 'living man' in a

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<sup>295</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Night and Day* ed. Julia Briggs (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 27.

<sup>296</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>297</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>298</sup> William Watson, 'Lachrymae Musarum', *Illustrated London News* (15<sup>th</sup> October 1892), p. 2.

<sup>299</sup> *Night and Day* p. 29.

<sup>300</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*

way that a manuscript draft of a poem never could, and indeed the process of writing *Night and Day* can be seen as an attempt to create such a living portrait (albeit a 'merging of elements of herself and of her adored sister Vanessa', as Julia Briggs observes).<sup>302</sup> If *Night and Day* is widely regarded as an imperfect novel, it is nonetheless an attempt to portray 'a real human being', something Woolf saw as lacking in late Victorian biography.<sup>303</sup> The criticism implicit in Woolf's treatment of Alardyce's legacy lies in the idea that it is precisely the veneration afforded 'eminent' poets and great men that leads biographers away from painting accurate portraits of the 'real' man, slippers and all, and towards exhaustively inclusive *Lives and Letters*. The bitterness felt towards this system can be discerned in the novel, where Ralph Denham remarks, 'I hate great men. The worship of greatness in the nineteenth century seems to me to explain the worthlessness of that generation.'<sup>304</sup>

Despite the differences between his own work and that of writers such as Joyce and Woolf, it seemed, initially, that D. H. Lawrence was united with other young writers of the early twentieth century in displaying a lack of reverence for the 'great men' of the Victorian past. In his first novel *The White Peacock*, published in 1910, Cyril, the narrator, visits a fairground where he 'watched for Lord Tennyson's bald head to come spinning round on the painted rim of the roundabouts, followed by a red-faced Lord Roberts, and a villainous looking Disraeli'.<sup>305</sup> The great Victorian figures look ludicrous here, their legacies

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<sup>302</sup> Julia Briggs, 'Introduction' to *ibid*, p. xiv.

<sup>303</sup> Virginia Woolf, 'Frederick Locker-Lampson: A Character Sketch', *The Essays of Virginia Woolf* Volume 3: 1919-1924, ed. Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1989), p. 239.

<sup>304</sup> *Night and Day*, p. 12.

<sup>305</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The White Peacock* ed. Andrew Robertson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), p. 35.

ultimately amounting to their portraits being rendered in varnished paint on the side of fairground roundabouts. In a letter written soon after the publication of this novel, Lawrence observed that he was 'no good' at titles, singling out that of his first novel as particularly embarrassing: 'That "White Peacock" must be shot: it is a bird from the pen of Wilkie Collins or of Ibsen.'<sup>306</sup> Lawrence's choice of writers he did not want to emulate is wide-ranging; he sets himself up as the inheritor of neither the mid-Victorian novelist nor the more modern-seeming playwright, who in the early twentieth century still exerted a strong influence over young writers, not least Joyce, who reviewed 'Ibsen's New Drama' *When We Dead Awaken* in 1900 and whose own 1915 play *Exiles* is strongly influenced by the Norwegian playwright.<sup>307</sup> Lawrence's turn away from both the high Victorian Collins and the less conventional and still very fashionable Ibsen shows just how keenly he felt the 'burden of the past'. Following this comment on the title of *The White Peacock*, he quotes Tennyson, in order to emphasize his point, "Now droops the milk-white peacock / like a ghost" adding, 'Nay, I would not for worlds capture that poor creature and haul it round in a "one-object show".'<sup>308</sup>

This apparent distaste for Tennyson – or, at least, this desire to appear un-Tennysonian – seems to be maintained in Lawrence's second novel, *The Trespasser*, published in 1912, where Siegmund, a musician, and his mistress Helena, who is one of his students, are taking an illicit holiday in the Isle of Wight

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<sup>306</sup> Letter to Frederick Atkinson, 24 June 1910, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence Volume I: September 1901 – May 1913*, ed. James T. Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 166.

<sup>307</sup> James Joyce, 'Ibsen's New Drama', reprinted in *Occasional, Critical, and Political Writing* ed. Kevin Barry (Oxford: OUP, 2000) pp. 30-49.

<sup>308</sup> Letter to Frederick Atkinson, 24 June 1910, in *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence Volume. 1: September 1901-May 1913*, p. 167.

and visit Tennyson Down, near Freshwater. The large stone cross erected in the poet's memory had been standing since 1897 and the pair visit it:

On the highest point of land stood a tall cross, railed in by a red iron fence. They read the inscription.

'That's all right – but a vilely ugly railing!' exclaimed Siegmund.

'Oh, they'd have to fence-in Lord Tennyson's white marble,' said Helena, rather indefinitely. He interpreted her according to his own idea.

'Yes – he did belittle great things, didn't he?' said Siegmund.

'Tennyson!' she exclaimed.

'Not peacocks and princesses – but the bigger things –'

'I shouldn't say so,' she declared.

'Ha-a!'

He sounded indeterminate, but was not really so.<sup>309</sup>

Siegmund is a progressive thinker (he has brought Nietzsche to read on this holiday), and could be seen to stand for the modern frame of mind which can see only the negative in Tennyson, viewing him as a man who was able to deal with the 'smaller things' admirably – including peacocks, the mention of which leads one to assume that Lawrence had the title of his earlier novel in mind. It is

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<sup>309</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *The Trespasser* ed. Elizabeth Mansfield (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 87. The inscription runs 'In memory of Alfred Lord Tennyson this cross is raised as a beacon to sailors by the people of Freshwater and other friends in England and America'.

interesting that Helena's shock at hearing 'Tennyson!' described in these ways leads Siegmund to stereotype Tennyson's art as other-worldly and 'fairytale' – 'peacocks and princesses' are the type of subject he did *not* belittle. The alliteration fosters the idea of a disdain even for the subjects which Siegmund feels Tennyson is equipped to address, and the apparent indeterminacy of his 'Ha-a!' does not in any way alter our idea of his negative opinion of the poet.

### 'The Reaction Against Tennyson'

A similar depreciation of Tennyson was taking place in mainstream literary criticism. In the volume of *The Cambridge History of English Literature* devoted to the Victorians published in 1916, Herbert Grierson (one of the most eminent professors of English literature at the time, and an expert on Donne and Shakespeare among others) gives a surprisingly candid assessment of Tennyson's achievement. He says that in *In Memoriam*, the poet 'failed to make this central experience, this great transition, imaginatively convincing and impressive'.<sup>310</sup> While Grierson praises the language of the *Idylls*, he believes that the collection's 'Parnassian beauties, its vaguely religious and somewhat timid morality reflect too vividly the spirit of their own day'.<sup>311</sup> And at the end of his

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<sup>310</sup> Herbert J. C. Grierson, 'The Tennysons' in *The Cambridge History of English Literature Vol. XIII: The Nineteenth Century II* ed. Sir A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1916), p. 33.

<sup>311</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38. The use of the word 'Parnassian' in relation to Tennyson is now associated with Gerard Manley Hopkins's assessment of *Enoch Arden*. Hopkins said that 'In Parnassian piece you feel that if you were the poet you could have gone on as he has done, you see yourself doing it, only with the difference that if you actually try you find you cannot write his Parnassian.' Letter to Alexander William Mowbray Baillie, 10th September, 1864, *Gerard Manley Hopkins: Selected Letters* ed. Catherine Phillips (Oxford: OUP, 1990), p. 25. The letter had not been published when Grierson's article was written.

chapter, even while he links the poet with Milton and Gray, he states that Tennyson was 'one of the few conscientious workmen among English poets'.<sup>312</sup> Even if this was meant in a positive way – reflecting the amount of industry Tennyson put into editing his poetry – the word 'workman' carries a clearly negative connotation, of dullness and effort as opposed to inspiration. Opinions in America were similarly mixed. A reviewer for the *New Republic* noted 'how his ideas have lost their importance, how nearly all his men and women have come to look smooth and to taste unsalted, while his music is still new to hear, except in his blank verse, and his landscape still quick with creative insight'.<sup>313</sup>

By the time of his death in 1916, the American novelist Henry James was one of the pre-eminent voices in the world of English literature. In 1917, an incomplete volume of memoirs from his early time in England, *The Middle Years*, was published, containing an account of a reading by Tennyson which at first seems to fit into this general depreciation: 'Oh dear, oh dear...I heard him, in cool surprise, take even more out of his verse than he had put in.'<sup>314</sup> The poet 'struck me as neither knowing nor communicating knowledge'; in a strikingly ironic turn of phrase, James decides that 'Tennyson was not Tennysonian'.<sup>315</sup> The Laureate, for James, did not live up to the ideal of the 'Bard' (James uses a capital letter for the term, by implication comparing the poet with Shakespeare) as suggested by his poems. However, the impression he took away from the encounter was not negative: 'My critical reaction hadn't in the least invalidated our great man's being a Bard – it had in fact made him and left him more a Bard

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<sup>312</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 44.

<sup>313</sup> 'Tennyson in his Time', *New Republic* (19<sup>th</sup> February 1916), p. 81.

<sup>314</sup> Henry James, *The Middle Years*, in *Autobiography* ed. Frederick W. Dupee (London: W. H. Allen, 1956), p. 593.

<sup>315</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 591; *ibid.*, p. 587.

than ever', by virtue of Tennyson remaining undefinable and aloof from the day-to-day world and its expectations of him.<sup>316</sup>

For one of the most important Tennyson critics in the world, A.C. Bradley was relatively pessimistic in his view of the poet's renown in the 1910s. Bradley delivered a lecture on 'The Reaction Against Tennyson' to the English Association in December 1916, which was published the following year as a pamphlet. He believed that 'the nadir of his fame may not quite be reached, but it can hardly be far off. To care for his poetry is to be old-fashioned, and to belittle it is to be in the movement.'<sup>317</sup> The word 'belittle' here, with the context of Lawrence's earlier use of the word and the idea of 'greatness' being so often cited in the period, indicates a reassessment of the idea of 'great men' and 'greatness' that lingered from the Victorian age. And in a remarkably prescient passage, Bradley predicted that in future years 'he will be considered the best poet of his own age, though not so much the best as his own age supposed'.<sup>318</sup> Staying close to his previous focus on the art of *In Memoriam*, he wrote of the ideas on art and religion expressed in the poem:

Why *In Memoriam* and other poems, because of these ideas,  
should lose all interest for those who share in the reaction, I do not  
understand; and still less how any one can offer the explanation  
that these ideas, one or all, are so alien to his own that he cannot  
read the poems with enjoyment or even with patience. That

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., p. 549.

<sup>317</sup> A. C. Bradley, *The Reaction Against Tennyson* (Oxford: Frederick Hall, 1917), p. 4.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.



explanation, it seems to me, implies an altogether perverse attitude towards poetry or, for that matter, any other product of imagination.<sup>319</sup>

Ultimately, Bradley comes to the conclusion that 'Tennyson is the only one of our great poets whose attitude towards the sciences of Nature was as a modern poet's attitude ought to be', and 'the only [poet] whose words constantly come to your mind as you read, if you can get no farther, your manual of astronomy or geology.'<sup>320</sup>

### Tennyson and the Great War

Bradley identified the 'reaction against Tennyson' in late 1916, but not all emerging poets in the 1910s seemed to be a part of it. When Isaac Rosenberg heard news of the beginning of the war in Cape Town in August 1914, he wrote, 'Are we going to have Tennyson's "Battle in the air", and the nations deluging the nations with blood from the air? Now is the time to go on an exploring expedition to the North Pole; to come back and find settled order again.'<sup>321</sup> A poetic response to the beginning of the war shows that Rosenberg did not necessarily view the alteration of order as a bad thing:

O! ancient crimson curse!

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<sup>319</sup> Ibid., pp. 8-9.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid., p. 19.

<sup>321</sup> Letter to Edward Marsh, August 8, 1914, *The Collected Works of Isaac Rosenberg* ed. Ian Parsons (London: Chatto & Windus, 1979), p. 205.

Corrode, consume.

Give back this universe

Its pristine bloom.<sup>322</sup>

There are echoes here of the beginning of 'Maud', where the narrator says of the 'blessings of peace' that 'we have made them a curse', and also the end of the poem, in particular 'flames / The blood-red blossom of war with a heart of fire'.<sup>323</sup>

The idea of war as potentially purgative which appears at the end of Tennyson's poem has long been interpreted as the poet's own opinion, and yet one should be wary of such a conclusion. The poem is, according to its title page, a 'monodrama', so the opinion expressed by the narrator cannot be definitively labelled as that of Tennyson himself, no matter how much the poet relished reading his poem aloud; the narrator by the latter part of the poem is clearly in a state of extreme confusion and possible insanity. The danger of the conclusion of this poem being taken as Tennyson's own opinion has endured. In his 1978 study of the poetry of the Great War, *Out of Battle*, Jon Silkin perpetuates the idea of 'Maud' as representative of Tennyson's own views. He argues that the end of the poem is 'to be thought of as representing a kind of thought then current. And since the mask is itself impaired, handled without irony or double consciousness, one might imagine that it expressed ideas Tennyson felt no need

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<sup>322</sup> 'On Receiving News of the War: Cape Town' lines 16-20, *The Poems and Plays of Isaac Rosenberg* ed. Vivien Noakes (Oxford: OUP, 2004), p. 84.

<sup>323</sup> 'Maud' I.I.vi, line 21, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1041; 'Maud' III.VI.iv, lines 52-3, *ibid.*, p.1092.

to defect from.<sup>324</sup> The conclusion drawn from 'thought then current' – in 1854 – is still relevant sixty years on, at least for Rosenberg.

We have seen how Alice Meynell's early war poems pointed the reader back towards *In Memoriam* as a potential source of solace at such a trying time, as well as evoking a sense of historical continuity for the grief being felt by so many in 1914. In another poem written at the start of the war, 'The Dead (1914)' Rupert Brooke also refers to the elegy: 'Blow out, you bugles, over the rich Dead!', echoing in its syntax 'Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky', and Brooke's second verse begins in a similarly Tennysonian manner, 'Blow, bugles, blow! They brought us, for our dearth, / Holiness, lacked so long, and Love, and Pain.'<sup>325</sup> The allusion to Tennyson is on the very surface: the lyric 'The splendour falls on castle walls', from *The Princess*, was one of the most frequently anthologised poems in Tennyson's *oeuvre* in the first half of the twentieth century, and is immediately recognizable in Brooke's poem. The end of Tennyson's poem runs:

O love, they die in yon rich sky,

They faint on hill or field or river:

Our echoes roll from soul to soul,

And grow for ever and for ever.

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,

And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.<sup>326</sup>

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<sup>324</sup> Jon Silkin, *Out of Battle: The Poetry of the Great War* (London: OUP, 1978), pp. 26-7.

<sup>325</sup> Rupert Brooke, *The Collected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1992), p. 314.

<sup>326</sup> *The Princess* III.IV, lines 13-18, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 783.

Brooke is specifically invoking a poem which is concerned with national heritage – ‘castle walls / And snowy summits old in story’ – as well as the endurance of the human spirit, ‘Our echoes’, a point which is proven by Brooke’s own poem resonating with the lyric from *The Princess*. The invocation of so famous a lyric from Tennyson appears designed, like the quotation in Meynell’s poem, to establish an idea of comfort through the historical continuity of poetical allusion.

Tennyson’s publishers in 1914, Macmillan, must have felt confident of the public’s desire for Tennyson at so uncertain a time. There are few other ways one can explain the publication, only a year after the complete one-volume 1913 edition of the poet’s *Works* edited by his son Hallam, of a one-penny pamphlet of *Tennyson’s Patriotic Poems* (which consisted of ‘A Call to Arms’, ‘Hands All Round’, ‘Britons, Guard Your Own’, ‘Riflemen Form!’, ‘The Empire’ and ‘The Fleet’) in 1914.<sup>327</sup> However, literary critics writing in the same year were rather less sure about the poet’s relevance. Ernest de Selincourt had his lectures on *English Poets and the National Ideal* published because the ‘student of English literature can perhaps do no better than help to set in circulation those ideas and emotions which have stirred our greatest poets in periods of national stress, and made them the mouthpiece of the finest spirit of their times.’<sup>328</sup> Its author was already established as an editor of Wordsworth, Spenser and Keats, and held a chair at Birmingham University. Judging from his book’s title, one might assume that Tennyson would take a prominent place among the patriotic English poets selected by a specialist in the Romantic period, and indeed, according to de

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<sup>327</sup> *Tennyson’s Patriotic Poems* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1914).

<sup>328</sup> Ernest de Selincourt, *English Poets and the National Ideal* (London: Humphrey Milford, 1915), Preface.

Selincourt, many readers of Tennyson perceived in his work 'a deep love of his native land based on a reverence for all that was great in her history, and he delighted to celebrate [...] her heroes, past and present.'<sup>329</sup> However, de Selincourt was inclined to disagree, saying that 'Tennyson was too much the spokesman of his age, too little of a seer', and that 'his patriotism was essentially insular. His love for his own country went hand in hand with an ignorance of others, even a contempt of them.'<sup>330</sup> As the critic was an authority on Wordsworth and Spenser, such a piece of outright criticism is telling.

And yet in 1917 Tennyson's patriotism was still being presented in a positive light, as far afield as Italy. In a period of relative stalemate on the Italian front, the critic Laura Torretta tried to draw her country and Britain together, claiming that 'Tennyson loved his country, he loved it with a deep and strong love, of both emotion and reason' in a pamphlet entitled *War and Peace in the Works of Alfred Tennyson*.<sup>331</sup> And in Britain, preachers were turning to the poet to help their audience find solace. In 1917 the Rev. T. Allen Moxon published a pamphlet containing 'a series of sermons preached at the Church of St. Anne's, Soho, in the summer of 1917', entitled *Tennyson's 'In Memoriam': Its Message to the Bereaved and Sorrowful*.<sup>332</sup> For Moxon, Tennyson's poem shows that although 'the war *appears* at first to be the triumph of the material side of man; engines of war in the air, on land, and beneath the sea, masses of munition, accumulated wealth, treasure, and credit', in fact 'the failure of material things to

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<sup>329</sup> Ibid., p. 99.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid., pp. 103-4.

<sup>331</sup> Laura Torretta, *Guerra e Pace Nell' Opera di Lord Tennyson* (Roma: Direzione della Nuova Antologia, 1917), p. 4. My Translation of 'Lo amò, il suo paese, lo amò d'un amore tenace e profondo, fatto di sentimento e di ragione.'

<sup>332</sup> Rev. T. Allen Moxon, *Tennyson's 'In Memoriam': Its Message to the Bereaved and Sorrowful* (London: Skeffington & Son, 1917), p. 7.

produce happiness points to spiritual things as those that matter most'.<sup>333</sup> This means that the central message of *In Memoriam* – which for Moxon is that 'the death of those whom we love teaches us that love survives the body, and finds its truest sphere in the region of the spirit' – is of immense importance to England in 1917.<sup>334</sup> This was maintained in the letters pages of the *Spectator*, where two separate correspondents cited him as foretelling the conflict: 'H.C.', on the 14<sup>th</sup> April 1917, observed that the editor 'may think the following lines remarkable as a forecast', before quoting the fourth stanza of Tennyson's 'Hands All Round' (1852), which the letter-writer left unattributed.<sup>335</sup> Just over a month later, a letter was printed from Katherine V. Mills, who asks whether 'any one besides myself has noticed how appropriate are the closing lines of Tennyson's 'Maud' to the present war', before quoting selectively from the last fifteen or so lines of the poem.<sup>336</sup>

Such citations of Tennyson as a prophet of the war seem at home in the *Spectator*, and operate more on the level of opportunist 'cut and paste' than any real poetic sensitivity on the part of the correspondents. The same cannot be

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid., pp. 9-10.

<sup>334</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>335</sup> 'H. C.', letter to *The Spectator*, April 14, 1917, p. 437. The verses are a statement of solidarity with America, and the final stanza runs:

O rise, our strong Atlantic sons,  
 When war against our freedom springs!  
 O speak to Europe through your guns!  
 They *can* be understood by kings.  
 You must not mix our Queen with those  
 That wish to keep their people fools;  
 Our freedom's foemen are her foes,  
 She comprehends the race she rules.  
 Hands all round!  
 God the tyrant's cause confound!  
 To our dear kinsmen of the West, my friends,  
 And the great cause of freedom round and round.

*The Poems of Tennyson*, pp. 1003-1004.

<sup>336</sup> Katherine V. Mills, letter to *The Spectator*, May 26, 1917, p. 589.

said of the allusions to Tennyson in the work of two of the most important poetic voices to emerge from the 1914-1918 war: Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, who met at Craiglockhart Hospital in 1917.

### Owen, Sassoon and Tennyson

Both Sassoon and Owen were admirers of Tennyson in their youth. Sassoon records that at the age of 13 he 'vaguely believed that I was going to be a poet, and had taken to reading Longfellow, Shelley and Tennyson'; in 1905 he recorded his experiences as a fledgling poet who 'loved Tennyson but was incapable of imitating his distinctness'; the following year, his passion for the poet can clearly be seen in his purchase of an expensive Kelmscott Press edition of 'Maud'.<sup>337</sup> In 1911, Owen bought some volumes of the *Quarterly Review*, which included the infamous review of Tennyson's 1832 *Poems*, which Owen viewed as 'the best pennyworth of humour I ever bought, albeit I would not let everybody enjoy it, lest Tennyson should come to shame'. He claimed to have spent a morning reading the volume 'in naughty levity', 'with all the guilty consciousness of infidelity to a professed hero'.<sup>338</sup> In April 1912 he wrote of the garden at Dunsden Vicarage, 'O magnificent environment wherein to read Tennyson!' and later in the same year he quoted the first verse of Tennyson's lyric 'Tears, idle tears' from *The Princess* in a letter because 'these lines might have been written

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<sup>337</sup> Dame Felicitas Corrigan, *Siegfried Sassoon: Poet's Pilgrimage* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1973), p.46; *ibid.*, p.55; Jean Moorcroft Wilson, *Siegfried Sassoon: The Making of a War Poet* (London: Duckworth Wilson, 1998), p.140.

<sup>338</sup> To Susan Owen, 21<sup>st</sup> November 1911, *Wilfred Owen: Collected Letters* ed. Harold Owen and John Bell (London: OUP, 1967), p. 96.

for me so true to my state are they – tho' I did not think of them at the time'.<sup>339</sup>

This emotional sympathy with Tennyson is matched in his verse. In 1909 he wrote a poem entitled 'To Poesy', like that of Tennyson which was first published in the *Memoir* in 1897; in 1912 he wrote 'Supposed Confessions of a Secondrate [sic] Sensitive Mind in Dejection', the title conflating Tennyson's 1830 poem 'Supposed Confessions of a Second-Rate Sensitive Mind' with Coleridge's 'Dejection: an Ode' (1802). Owen's poem contains the following lines:

towering shapes,  
Black and chaotic, choke the sickening day.  
Voices moan round, and from the sodden clay  
Mist-shrouds crawl up, in token that there gapes  
A grave for me at hand.<sup>340</sup>

The phrase 'Voices moan round' is a clear allusion to Tennyson's 1842 poem 'Ulysses', where the eponymous hero tells us that 'the deep / Moans round with many voices'.<sup>341</sup> Owen's verses are considerably darker than those of the Victorian poet, who in writing 'Ulysses' wanted to express 'the need for going forward, and braving the struggle of life'.<sup>342</sup>

'Ulysses' recurred to Sassoon in the trenches; its progressive, optimistic idea of heroism echoes ironically in his poem 'The One-Legged Man' (written in

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<sup>339</sup> To Susan Owen, 3 April 1912, *ibid.*, p.127; to Susan Owen, August 1912, *ibid.*, p.152.

<sup>340</sup> Wilfred Owen, 'Supposed Confessions of a Secondrate Sensitive Mind in Dejection' lines 49-53, *The Complete Poems and Fragments* ed. Jon Stallworthy, 2 Vols. (London: Chatto & Windus, 1983), Vol. I, p. 14.

<sup>341</sup> 'Ulysses' lines 55-56, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 565.

<sup>342</sup> *Memoir* Volume I, p. 196.



August 1916). In 'Ulysses' the eponymous narrator returns to his homeland after the Trojan war and his long journey home, but finds Ithaca lacking:

Matched with an aged wife, I mete and dole  
Unequal laws unto a savage race,  
That hoard, and sleep, and feed, and know not me.<sup>343</sup>

The returning hero, who sees himself as 'always roaming with a hungry heart', finds the day-to-day concerns of governing the island dull, the duties of an 'idle king'.<sup>344</sup> Despite this 'hungry heart', he personifies himself with the act of drinking, in opposition to eating; he claims that he will 'drink / Life to the lees', and that he has 'drunk delight of battle with my peers'.<sup>345</sup> The last four lines of Sassoon's poem run:

Splendid to eat and sleep and choose a wife,  
Safe with his wound, a citizen of life.  
He hobbled blithely through the garden gate,  
And thought: 'Thank God they had to amputate!'<sup>346</sup>

The first line of the quotation may allude to 'Ulysses', but in Sassoon's poem, rather than rail against being 'Matched with an aged wife', the protagonist views the situation as something positive, relishing his 'choice'; the list of 'splendid'

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<sup>343</sup> 'Ulysses' lines 3-5, *The Poems of Tennyson*, pp. 561-2.

<sup>344</sup> 'Ulysses' line 12, *ibid.*, p. 562; 'Ulysses' line 1, *ibid.*, p. 561.

<sup>345</sup> 'Ulysses' lines 6-7, *ibid.*, p. 562; 'Ulysses' line 16, *ibid.*

<sup>346</sup> Siegfried Sassoon, 'The One-Legged Man' lines 9-12, *The War Poems* ed. Rupert Hart-Davis (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. 37.

infinitive verbs ('to eat and sleep and choose') recalls Tennyson's Ulysses witheringly listing the actions of his 'savage race', 'that hoard, and sleep, and feed'. There is also a slight echo in Sassoon's 'eat' of Tennyson's 'mete', one of the apparently tiresome duties of Ulysses in Ithaca. The modernised Grecian of Tennyson's poem is full of resolve to go forward, to continue exploring: the poem ends with his declaring himself 'strong in will / To strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.'<sup>347</sup> Sassoon's returning martial hero is happy just to enjoy the most basic of home comforts, but the adjective 'blithely' highlights the fact that this is *not* a happy resolution. The 'neatness' of the poem, its prominent rhyme of two incongruous phrases, the homely 'garden gate' and brutal 'amputate', makes clear the outrage which the reader is meant to feel at a situation which would allow a soldier to express happiness at hobbling 'blithely' home with one leg, in a manner so unlike the return of Tennyson's Victorian version of Ulysses. If comfort can be derived from a permanent injury which renders the soldier unfit for combat – 'safe with his wound' – something has gone very wrong. The allusion to Tennyson in this poem reinforces the breakdown in the old order, which is articulated through the seemingly incompatible heroic language of 'Ulysses'; the clear rhyme scheme and regular metre, as well as the echoes of Tennyson, seem designed to highlight the sorry state of affairs where a man who has lost a leg can express happiness at his injury as it spares him from the horrors of the trenches.

Some critics have identified in Sassoon's work an apparent dissatisfaction with Tennyson. R. L. Barth sees the former's poem 'Counter-Attack' as 'an attack

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<sup>347</sup> 'Ulysses' lines 69-70, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 566.

directed at the lying [...] rhetoric of Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade".<sup>348</sup> Barth believes that through the poem, Sassoon is attacking 'Tennyson, as well as the entire British tradition of the public glorification of war as an ennobling experience'.<sup>349</sup> The poem starts with a vivid, sickening depiction of the trenches, where

naked sodden buttocks, mats of hair,  
Bulged, clotted heads slept in the plastering slime.  
And then the rain began, – the jolly old rain!<sup>350</sup>

The phrase 'jolly old', much like 'splendid' in 'The One-Legged Man', serves to question the British attitude of keeping a 'stiff upper lip'. This is accentuated by the clear references to 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' in the third verse of 'Counter Attack':

An officer came blundering down the trench:  
'Stand-to and man the fire-step!' On he went ...  
Gasping and bawling, 'Fire-step ... counter-attack!'  
Then the haze lifted. Bombing on the right  
Down the old sap: machine-guns on the left;  
And stumbling figures looming out in front.  
'O Christ, they're coming at us!' Bullets spat,

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<sup>348</sup> R. L. Barth, 'Sassoon's "Counter-Attack"', *Explicator* 49.2 (1991), p. 117.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 118.

<sup>350</sup> 'Counter-Attack' lines 11-13, Sassoon, *The War Poems*, p. 94.

And he remembered his rifle ... rapid fire ...  
And started blazing wildly ... then a bang  
Crumpled and spun him sideways, knocked him out  
To grunt and wriggle: none heeded him; he choked  
And fought the flapping veils of smothering gloom,  
Lost in a blurred confusion of yells and groans ...  
Down, and down, and down, he sank and drowned,  
Bleeding to death. The counter-attack had failed.<sup>351</sup>

The repetition of 'right', 'left, and 'front' echoes Tennyson's poem, as well as the use of the word 'blundering'. For Barth, 'the rhetoric is the issue,' as 'Tennyson's is that of public celebrations and recitations, incapable of grasping suffering.'<sup>352</sup> It would be easy to agree here, especially if we read what Wilfred Owen, soon to meet Sassoon, wrote about Tennyson in a letter of 1917:

The other day I read a Biography of Tennyson, which says he was unhappy, even in the midst of his fame, wealth, and domestic serenity. Divine discontent! I can quite believe he never knew happiness for one moment such as I have – for one or two moments. But as for misery, was he ever frozen alive, with dead men for comforters. Did he hear the moaning at the bar, not at twilight and the evening bell only, but at dawn, noon, and night, eating and sleeping, walking and working, always the close

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<sup>351</sup> 'Counter-Attack' lines 25-39, *ibid.*, pp. 94-5.

<sup>352</sup> Barth, p. 117.

moaning of the Bar; the thunder, the hissing and the whining of the

Bar?

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Tennyson, it seems, was always a great child.

So should I have been, but for Beaumont Hamel.<sup>353</sup>

Owen's phrase 'great child' does not imply that his opinion of Tennyson has deteriorated, but rather that he sees a version of his adult self, unimpeded by the war, in the figure of the Victorian Laureate. The absolute difference made by the war has led Owen to knowingly misquote the Victorian. The allusion to 'Crossing the Bar' is not simply an appreciative citation of a memorable phrase such as 'moans round with many voices', as Owen's allusions to Tennyson function in the early poems, but a fundamental misreading of the poem, where the speaker asks that there be 'no moaning of the bar [...] But such a tide as moving seems asleep'.<sup>354</sup> It was not the 'moaning of the bar' the speaker of 'Crossing the Bar' heard at 'twilight and evening bell only', but rather the 'clear call' of his mortality. Owen clearly knew this poem well enough to quote extensively from it, and the poem was still included at the end of most editions of Tennyson in 1917; for Owen the war veteran, there is *only* the moaning of the bar, and no hope of the tranquillity Tennyson desires for his death.

When Owen arrived at Craiglockhart Hospital, he was quick to claim that 'I think if I had the choice of making friends with Tennyson or with Sassoon I

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<sup>353</sup> To Susan Owen, 8<sup>th</sup> August 1917, Wilfred Owen, *Collected Letters*, p. 482. Beaumont Hamel was one of the battlefields on which the onslaught of the Somme in 1916 was launched; Owen fought there in 1917.

<sup>354</sup> 'Crossing the Bar' lines 3-5, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1458.

should go to Sassoon. [...] That is why I have not yet dared to go up to him and parley in a casual way'.<sup>355</sup> When he eventually summoned the courage, a friendship quickly blossomed, and by November 1917 Owen parodied Tennyson's 'Merlin and the Gleam' in a letter to Sassoon, ending it:

I am Owen; and I am dying.

I am Wilfred; and I follow the Gleam.<sup>356</sup>

At the time, Owen was not dying; and yet he must have been aware that Tennyson's poem 'Merlin and the Gleam' had been read as 'clearly autobiographical' ever since its publication.<sup>357</sup> This throwaway parody shows that Tennyson was part of the vocabulary the two poets used to address one another. Owen makes reference to the same poem in one of his serious pieces of verse, 'Six O'Clock in Princes Street', which he wrote between August and October 1917:

Neither should I go fooling over clouds,

Following gleams unsafe, untrue,

And tiring after beauty through star-crowds,

Dared I go side by side with you<sup>358</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> To Susan Owen, 15 August 1917, Wilfred Owen, *Collected Letters*, p. 485.

<sup>356</sup> To Siegfried Sassoon, 27 November 1917, *ibid.*, p. 512.

<sup>357</sup> For example, Alfred Ainger, 'The Death of Tennyson', *Macmillan's Magazine* LXVII (November 1892), p. 80.

<sup>358</sup> Wilfred Owen, 'Six O'Clock in Princes Street' lines 5-8, *The Complete Poems and Fragments*, Vol. I p. 102.

This would position the speaker of the poem – very possibly Owen himself, as he describes a similar experience in a letter to his mother in August 1917 – as a sympathetic admirer of Tennyson. The later poem ‘Hospital Barge’ also refers to Tennyson’s Arthurian poetry:

Budging the sluggard ripples of the Somme,  
A barge round old C  risy slowly slewed.  
Softly her engines down the current screwed,  
And chuckled softly with contented hum,  
Till fairy tinklings struck their croonings dumb.  
The waters rumpling at the stern subdued;  
The lock-gate took her bulging amplitude;  
Gently from out the gurgling lock she swum.

One reading by that calm bank shaded eyes  
To watch her lessening westward quietly.  
Then, as she neared the bend, her funnel screamed.  
And that long lamentation made him wise  
How unto Avalon, in agony,  
Kings passed in the dark barge which Merlin dreamed.<sup>359</sup>

The figure ‘reading’ here, as Jon Stallworthy points out, is almost certainly reading a book of Arthurian legends, which he claims could be Malory, or

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<sup>359</sup> ‘Hospital Barge’, *ibid.*, p. 127.

Tennyson's 'The Passing of Arthur' from *The Holy Grail and Other Poems* (1870), a copy of which Owen had bought in Edinburgh in July 1917.<sup>360</sup> Although there are phrases common to all three authors – 'barge' and 'lamentation' in particular figure in both Malory's and Tennyson's versions of the myth – it could be assumed that the figure is reading Tennyson, thanks to the knowledge of Owen's recent purchase and also because of the phrasing of the lines – in 'The Passing of Arthur' we read of a 'dusky barge', whose 'decks' are 'dense with stately forms', and we hear 'as it were one voice, an agony / Of lamentation, like a wind that shrills / All night in a waste land, where no one comes'.<sup>361</sup> This is not only a matter of certain words recurring in both poems, but also of a tonal echo, in the shared assonance of 'dense with stately forms' in Tennyson, and its equivalent in the second and third lines of Owen's poem where sounds from the phrase are half-echoed in 'softly'. Despite Owen's belief that Tennyson was 'always a great child', his imaginative engagement with the poet was maintained until his untimely death in 1918.

This is mirrored, in a more subtle way, in Sassoon's poetry. If we think back to 'Counter-Attack', we can begin to see how difficult it actually is to cite Sassoon as a detractor of Tennyson. The poem certainly contains clear references to 'The Charge of the Light Brigade'. Tennyson's 'some one had blundered' is one of the most famous lines from a military poem in the English language, and was common currency at the time; it was regularly included in anthologies in the 1900s, and would have been well-known to soldiers in the trenches. Sassoon's 'blundering' officer, who while giving his instructions is

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<sup>360</sup> Notes to *ibid.*

<sup>361</sup> 'The Passing of Arthur' lines 361-370, *The Poems of Tennyson*, pp. 1751-2.



'gasping and bawling', appears to be an unfit (presumably fat) figure of the old guard, and it seems that he is meant to be associated with Tennyson's poem. However, this is not necessarily a condemnation of Tennyson. The Victorian was inspired to commemorate the cavalry at Balaclava by a piece in *The Times* which wrote of 'some colossal blunder' on the part of commanding officers.<sup>362</sup> Sassoon's poem in fact shows considerable continuities of attitude with that of Tennyson, as the soldiers of both wars are drawn together by their suffering at the hands of their 'blundering' superiors. If we turn to 'Battalion-Relief' we can find further evidence to undermine Barth's idea of Sassoon as anti-Tennyson:

What's all this mob at the cross-roads? Where are the guides? ...  
'Lead on with Number One.' And off they go.  
'Three minute intervals.' (Poor blundering flies,  
Sweating and blindly burdened; who's to know  
If death will catch them in those two dark miles?)  
More rain.<sup>363</sup>

Here it is the foot-soldiers who are 'blundering' off into the dark, unaware of their future. By virtue of the repetition of 'blunder', in a poem written a month after the publication of 'Counter-Attack', the soldiers and their superior officers are drawn together in a common situation of 'blundering' which has been caused by changes in the nature of warfare.

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<sup>362</sup> Christopher Ricks, notes in *ibid.*, p. 1034.

<sup>363</sup> 'Battalion-Relief' lines 15-20, Sassoon, *The War Poems*, p. 117.

### D. H. Lawrence: the war and desire

We have already seen D. H. Lawrence in 1910 portraying Tennyson as a varnished head on a fairground ride, and how the poet is mocked by the progressive protagonist of Lawrence's second novel, *The Trespasser*. One could conclude that his wartime experiences are likely to have prejudiced him further still against the poet, as the 1914-1918 period was one of immense upheaval in his life. *The Rainbow* was published in 1915, to far from universal acclaim – according to James Douglas, reviewing the book in *The Star*, 'there is no doubt that a book of this kind has no right to exist'<sup>364</sup> – and it was prosecuted almost immediately in an obscenity trial thanks mainly to the explicit descriptions of sexual desire, and the lesbian relationship between Ursula Brangwen and her teacher Winifred Inger. Every copy of the book was destroyed, a traumatic experience which saw Lawrence move to the extremity of England, Zennor in Cornwall. The experience of seeing his work treated in this manner was compounded by news from Flanders of the British war effort, and the immense casualties suffered by both sides. Lawrence had eloped to Germany with Frieda Weekley in 1912 – the pair would later marry – and she had family members in the German Army, as her father was a German army officer, and her cousin was the 'Red Baron', Captain Manfred Von Richthofen. Lawrence and Frieda suffered continual harassment in Cornwall, being accused, among other things, of sending signals to German submarines. Lawrence's response to the war was strong – thinking it 'dreadful' although believing that 'the *will* to war' could be

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<sup>364</sup> Review of *The Rainbow* in *The Star*, 22 October 1915, reprinted in *D. H. Lawrence: The Critical Heritage* ed. R. P. Drapes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970), p. 93.

found in the heart of every Englishman and every German.<sup>365</sup> And yet, as I will show, his attitude towards Tennyson remained consistent – and in no senses uniquely negative – throughout the 1910s and beyond.

Frieda's explanation for agreeing to marry her first husband, Ernest Weekley, was that 'I had been reading Tennyson, and I thought Ernest was Lancelot!'<sup>366</sup> This misplaced, if affectionate, inspiration drawn from Tennyson's Arthurian poetry is replicated in the young Ursula Brangwen in Lawrence's 1915 novel *The Rainbow*. Although she believed that at school 'most tedious was the close study of English literature. Why should one remember the things one read?' she is nonetheless moved at a very young age by the poet's work, particularly *Idylls of the King*.<sup>367</sup> The first four lines of 'Lancelot and Elaine' are quoted in an interior monologue:

How she loved it! How she leaned in her bedroom window with her black, rough hair on her shoulders, and her warm face all rapt, and gazed across at the churchyard and the little church, which was a turretted castell, whence Launcelot would ride just now, would wave to her as he rode by, his scarlet cloak passing behind the dark yew-trees and between the open space: whilst she, Ah she, would remain the lonely maid high up and isolated in the tower,

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<sup>365</sup> Letter to Harriet Monroe, 17 November, 1914, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence Volume II: June 1913 – October 1916*, ed. George J. Zyaturk and James Boulton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 232.

<sup>366</sup> Quoted in David Garnett, *Great Friends* (London: Macmillan, 1979), p. 78.

<sup>367</sup> D.H. Lawrence, *The Rainbow* ed. Mark Kinkad-Weekes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 316.

polishing the terrible shield, weaving it a covering with a true device, and waiting, waiting, always remote and high.<sup>368</sup>

The yearning which, as we are told at the beginning of the novel, characterises the Brangwen women, is evident here, not least through the copious use of commas at the end of the passage. The repetition of 'waiting, waiting' also brings to mind Tennyson's 'Mariana' alone and remote, repeating the word 'awearry', looking out of her window for the lover who is yet to return.

Lawrence's short novel *The Virgin and the Gypsy* was published in 1926, however the same 'Tennysonian' yearning voiced in *The Rainbow* recurs in the later work. The story concerns the rites of passage of a young upper-middle class woman, Yvette Saywell, who, following her mother's elopement, lives with her father and his imposing mother and sister. Life in the house is stifling, dominated by what Yvette sees as 'the stony, implacable will-to-power in the old and motherly-seeming Granny'.<sup>369</sup> Yvette becomes aware of the possibilities in the world for love and desire through a chance encounter with the gipsy of the title, who tells her her fortune and then reappears at the house selling brooms and candlestick holders, and gives her 'that naked suggestion of desire which acted on her like a spell, and robbed her of her will'.<sup>370</sup> The gipsy allows her to envisage a world away from the stifling atmosphere at home with her grandmother, whose insidious insults and demanding nature reach a crescendo

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<sup>368</sup> Ibid., p. 247.

<sup>369</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *The Virgin and the Gipsy and Other Stories* ed. Michael Herbert, Bethan Jones and Lindeth Vasey (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p. 16.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid., p. 37.

one night as Yvette and her sister Lucille are making a dress for the former out of blue silk velour:

Then she went between the mirrors, to look at herself once more.

As she did so, she sent the second mirror, that she had perched carelessly on the piano, sliding with a rattle to the floor.

Luckily it did not break. But everybody started badly.

'She's smashed the mirror!' cried Aunt Cissie.<sup>371</sup>

The mirror remains unbroken, but as it had belonged to the girls' absent mother there ensues a major argument during which the elderly grandmother accuses Yvette and Lucille of coming from 'half-depraved stock'.<sup>372</sup> As Yvette heads upstairs, having lost the argument:

At the first landing, she stood as she nearly always did, to gaze through the window that looked to the road and the bridge. Like the Lady of Shalott, she seemed always to imagine that someone would come along singing *Tirra-lirra!* or something equally intelligent, by the river.<sup>373</sup>

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<sup>371</sup> Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid., p. 35.

The reference to 'The Lady of Shalott', as hinted at by the non-breaking of the mirror, is made explicit and continues in the following chapter, where we find her in the garden of the house:

She always expected *something* to come down the slant of the road  
from Papplewick, and she always lingered at the landing window.  
Often a cart came, or a motor-car, or a lorry with stone, or a  
laborer, or one of the servants. But never anybody who sang *Tirra-  
lirra!* by the river. The tirra-lirraing days seem to have gone by.<sup>374</sup>

Yvette recognises an inherent absurdity in thinking of herself as a modern Lady of Shalott, and the situations of the two female protagonists differ significantly; in Tennyson's poem, 'the mirror cracked from side to side',<sup>375</sup> but in the modern version of the story the mirror stays intact, and Yvette does not die. The novel ends differently from the poem, as the gipsy sends her a note in which he tells her his name, Joe Boswell; the people of Camelot only learn the Lady of Shalott's name after her death, whereas Boswell and Yvette go on living after the flood, although it is almost certain that they are destined not to be united in love. Despite these apparent differences, the desire for contact with the outside world, initiated by a chance encounter with a stranger, is maintained in Yvette's modern encounter with the gipsy, and it leads not to her death, but the death of the Granny – the book ends with the gipsy rescuing Yvette from a flood which claims the elderly woman's life – if anything a more optimistic ending than that of the

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>375</sup> 'The Lady of Shalott', line 115, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 359.

poem.<sup>376</sup> It would seem that, however qualified the yearning of the characters in Lawrence's novels may be, it is still frequently expressed in Tennyson's words.

This Tennysonian longing is not limited to female characters in Lawrence's novels. Tom Brangwen, Ursula's step-grandfather, the subject of the early chapters of *The Rainbow*, at school 'sat betrayed with emotion when the teacher of literature read, in a moving fashion, Tennyson's "Ulysses" or Shelley's "Ode to the West Wind". His lips parted, his eyes filled with a strained, almost suffering light'.<sup>377</sup> As the teacher read on, he 'was moved by this experience beyond all calculation, he almost dreaded it, it was so deep'.<sup>378</sup> Tennyson is consistently associated with visionary power in the novel. In one of the most striking passages, Will Brangwen, part of the next generation, visits Lincoln Cathedral:

Here the satisfaction he had yearned after came near, towards this,  
the porch of the great Unknown, all reality gathered, and there, the  
altar was the mystic door, through which all and everything must  
move on to eternity.<sup>379</sup>

Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen have argued that this passage combines phrases from two of Tennyson's poems, in what amounts to a rethinking of progress and faith.<sup>380</sup> The very end of *In Memoriam* runs 'And one far-off divine

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<sup>376</sup> The flood can also be read as a reference to George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860).

<sup>377</sup> *The Rainbow*, p.17.

<sup>378</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>379</sup> *Ibid.*, p.191.

<sup>380</sup> Evelyn J. Hinz and John J. Teunissen, 'Odysseus, Ulysses, and Ursula: The Context of Lawrence's *Rainbow*', in *The Modernists: Studies in a Literary Phenomenon* ed. Lawrence B. Gamache and Ian S. MacNiven (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses 1987), pp.171-191.

event, / To which the whole creation moves'.<sup>381</sup> The revelation which Will is experiencing at Lincoln Cathedral – situated, of course, in Tennyson's own Lincolnshire and outside which G.F. Watts's statue of the poet has stood since 1905 – is voiced in a half-echo of the epilogue from *In Memoriam*, an expression of renewed faith as a result of the honest doubt described in the main body of the poem. This is linked to another of Tennyson's poetical responses to the death of Arthur Henry Hallam, 'Ulysses', where we read:

Yet all experience is an arch wherethrough  
Gleams that untravelled world, whose margin fades  
For ever and for ever when I move.<sup>382</sup>

The idea of there being a higher world, a higher plane of existence, which is unreachable in the small English towns and villages in which the majority of Lawrence's novels are set, recurs throughout his *oeuvre*.

In a scene in *The Trespasser*, Barbara Hardy has noted that 'Lawrence momentarily makes Siegmund contradict his own judgment that Tennyson belittled the big things',<sup>383</sup> during a crisis of faith. While on his holiday, embracing Helena, he feels 'quite alone' while looking at the night sky:

But this night he did not want comfort. If he were 'an infant crying in  
the night,' it was crying that a woman could not still. He was abroad

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<sup>381</sup> *In Memoriam*, Epilogue lines 143-4, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p.988.

<sup>382</sup> 'Ulysses' lines 19-21, *ibid.*, p.563.

<sup>383</sup> Barbara Hardy, *Tennyson and the Novelists* (Lincoln: Tennyson Society, 1992), p.22.



seeking courage and faith for his own soul. He, in loneliness, must search the night for faith.<sup>384</sup>

Siegmund has looked for a higher love with Helena and this crisis is leading to the ultimate conclusion, where he finds the union deficient, their holiday affair almost too passionate, and beset with stilted conversations like the one about the Tennyson memorial. His crisis of selfhood and purpose is articulated in the language of *In Memoriam*, just as Owen's is in *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, and Siegfried's dilemma closely mirrors the emphasis on the unconscious and, indeed, un-knowing parts of the brain in Tennyson's poem. The entire section runs:

Oh yet we trust that somehow good  
Will be the final goal of ill,  
To pangs of nature, sins of will,  
Defects of doubt, and taints of blood;  
  
That nothing walks with aimless feet;  
That not one life shall be destroyed,  
Or cast as rubbish to the void,  
When God hath made the pile complete,  
  
That not a worm is cloven in vain;

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<sup>384</sup> *The Trespasser*, p. 128.

That not a moth with vain desire  
Is shrivelled in a fruitless fire,  
Or but subserves another's gain.

Behold, we know not anything;  
I can but trust that good shall fall  
At last – far off – at last, to all,  
And every winter change to spring.

So runs my dream: but what am I?  
An infant crying in the night:  
An infant crying for the light:  
And with no language but a cry.<sup>385</sup>

The same phrase from the last stanza recurs to Ursula Brangwen in *The Rainbow*. She desires a higher plane of feeling from her relationships, and has embarked on a doomed love affair with her friend Winifred Inger. Her desire for something higher in life is clear from her response to a proposal from Anthony, the brother of her friend Maggie:

Her heart flamed with sensation of him, of the fascinating thing he  
offered her, and with sorrow, and with an inconsolable sense of

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<sup>385</sup> In Memoriam LIV, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p.909.

loneliness. Her soul was an infant crying in the night. He had no soul. Oh, and why had she? He was the cleaner.<sup>386</sup>

The repeated citation of Tennyson's phrase at moments of spiritual crisis cannot be a coincidence. At each of these points in the narrative the characters, who can all be said to be seeking a higher plane of understanding and feeling, are ultimately rendered bereft of any such feelings, their loneliness best summed up by Tennyson's verse. This ultimate childishness could be seen as negative – thus implying a criticism, where Wilfred Owen voiced regret.

We can understand the issue more fully if we turn to *Women in Love*, which was published in 1920. By this point, Lawrence had read the new avant-garde of novelists represented by writers like Joyce, and described their work in contemptuous tones, writing that the art of fiction as practised by Joyce, Proust, and Dorothy Richardson was 'dying in a very long-drawn-out fourteen-volume death-agony, and absorbedly, childishly interested in the phenomenon'.<sup>387</sup>

Lawrence was always at odds with the 'Modernists', despite the *modernity* of his prose; as Hugh Stevens has noted, 'before one attempts to locate Lawrence's modernism, one needs to acknowledge how Victorian he is'.<sup>388</sup> According to Stevens, 'his fiction continues a project begun by George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell, and continued by Thomas Hardy: an analysis of the impact of modern technologies on provincial communities, in which the "shock of the new" was

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<sup>386</sup> *The Rainbow*, p. 386.

<sup>387</sup> 'The Future of the Novel', *Study of Thomas Hardy and Other Essays* ed. Bruce Steele (London: Grafton Books, 1986), p. 137.

<sup>388</sup> Hugh Stevens, 'D. H. Lawrence, Organicism, and the Modern Novel', *The Cambridge Companion to the Modernist Novel* ed. Morag Shiach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 142.

caused by the industrial revolution rather than by aesthetic revolutions.<sup>389</sup> The division is made explicit in *Women in Love*. The novel concerns Ursula and Gudrun Brangwen and their affairs with, respectively, Rupert Birkin (a school inspector) and Gerald Crich (who owns a mining firm). At the end of the novel, Gerald and Gudrun ultimately part, she for the arms of Loerke, an artist, and Gerald kills himself. The scene of their parting is as intense as the relationship that has preceded it:

What then! Was she his mother? Had she asked for a child, whom she must nurse through the nights, for her lover. She despised him, she despised him, she hardened her heart. An infant crying in the night, this Don Juan.

Yes, but how she hated the infant crying in the night. She would murder it gladly. She would stifle it and bury it, like Hetty Sorrell did. No doubt Hetty Sorrell's infant cried in the night – no doubt Arthur Donnithorne's infant would. Ha – the Arthur Donnithornes, the Geraldos of this world. So manly by day, yet all the while, such a crying of infants in the night. Let them turn into mechanisms, let them. Let them become instruments, pure machines, pure wills that work like clock-work, in perpetual repetition. Let them be this, let them be taken up entirely in their work, let them be perfect parts of a great machine, having a slumber of constant repetition. Let Gerald manage his firm. There

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<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

he would be satisfied, as satisfied as a wheel-barrow that goes  
backwards and forwards along a plank all day – she had seen it.<sup>390</sup>

Gerald's company is a mining firm, which in the novel stands for an industrial apparatus at odds with the natural landscape and which Lawrence believed would reduce people to the mechanical, making them essentially 'wheel-barrow' as Gudrun puts it. Lawrence's work has been labelled misogynist, and it is true that he was clearly more interested in his male characters, especially in his later work, and with establishing a new conception of sexuality (which he managed most completely in *Lady Chatterley's Lover*). But it is worth noting that reviewers of *The Trespasser* were unsure whether its author was a man or a woman, and it is also dangerous to say that he fully identifies with characters like Crich, Birkin or Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*: for all the passion and persuasiveness of their arguments they are always slightly ironized and the narrative remains detached from them. If we look at Lawrence's letters from the period he was writing *Women in Love*, we find him echoing Ursula's complaint. In a letter to E. M. Forster from 1915, Lawrence writes:

We are tired of contemplating this one phase of the history of  
creation, which we call humanity. We are tired of measuring  
everything by the human standard: whether man is the standard or  
criterion, or whether he is but a factor in the Whole whose issue  
and whose return we have called God.

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<sup>390</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Women in Love* ed. David Farmer, Lindeth Vasey and John Worthen (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 466.

I am tired of class, and humanity, and personal salvation.  
What care I whether my neighbour feels he is saved or not – saved,  
competed, fulfilled, consummated? I am tired to death of the infant  
crying in the night. I am sick of protesting Job, cursing his birth and  
his begetting. Is he so important, or his sufferings of such moment?  
Let him have done.<sup>391</sup>

In this, Lawrence is distanced from Gerald Crich and moves closer to Rupert Birkin, who 'wanted sex to revert to the level of the other appetites, to be regarded as a functional process, not as fulfilment. He believed in sex marriage. But beyond this, he wanted a further conjunction, where man had being and woman had being, two pure beings, each constituting the freedom of the other, balancing each other like two poles of one force, like two angels, or two demons.'<sup>392</sup> This mirrors the lack of satisfaction Ursula and Siegmund find in most of their relationships in *The Rainbow* and *The Trespasser* respectively. Lawrence was in agreement with the notion of a 'primitive' relationship with the body, and in particular with sexual desire. When it seems as if Birkin has finally achieved this, there is a slight qualification:

'Not this, not this,' he whimpered to himself, as the first perfect mood of softness and sleep-loveliness ebbed back away from the rushing of passion that came up his limbs and over his face as she

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<sup>391</sup> Letter to E. M. Forster, 28 January, 1915, *The Letters of D. H. Lawrence Volume II: June 1913-October 1916*, p. 266.

<sup>392</sup> *Women in Love*, p. 199.

drew him. And soon he was a perfect hard flame of passionate desire for her. Yet in the small core of the flame was an unyielding anguish of another thing. But this also was lost; he only wanted her, with an extreme desire that seemed inevitable as death, beyond question.

Then, satisfied and shattered, fulfilled and destroyed, he went home away from her, drifting vaguely through the darkness, lapsed into the old fire of burning passion. Far away, far away, there seemed to be a small lament in the darkness. But what did it matter? What did it matter, what did anything matter save this ultimate and triumphant experience of physical passion, that had blazed up anew like a new spell of life. 'I was becoming quite dead-alive, nothing but a word-bag,' he said in triumph, scorning his other self. Yet somewhere far off and small, the other hovered.<sup>393</sup>

The 'small lament in the darkness' appears close to the 'infant crying in the night', and this seems at first simply to be another manifestation of the crisis of the 'higher love' as expressed earlier. And yet the ending of the novel – this same character's reaction to the death of his close friend Gerald – offers an insight into what this 'unyielding anguish of another thing' may be. As Birkin stands by his friend's corpse, he says 'He should have loved me'.<sup>394</sup> The 'infant crying in the night' may well be, in Lawrence's opinion, crying for a different kind of desire. The novel ends with Ursula telling Birkin 'I don't want anybody else but you. Why

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid., pp.187-8.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., p. 480.

isn't it the same with you?'<sup>395</sup> Birkin replies, 'Having you, I can live my life without anybody else, any other sheer intimacy. But to make it complete, really happy, I wanted eternal union with a man too: another kind of love.'<sup>396</sup> And the ultimate yearning endures, as the novel ends:

You can't have two kinds of love. Why should you!

'It seems as if I can't,' he said. 'Yet I wanted it.'

'You can't have it, because it's false, impossible,' she said.

'I don't believe that,' he answered.<sup>397</sup>

The infant remains crying in the night; at this point one should remember the source of the quotation, *In Memoriam*, an elegy to a dead male friend and the fullest expression of close male companionship in the English canon. Lawrence here expands on the Victorian, Tennysonian original – adding emphasis to the physical and sexual – to show both the endurance of his literary elder as well as the inevitable process of modification in time.

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., p. 481.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid.

<sup>397</sup> Ibid.



## Chapter Five

### The 1920s

We have seen how in the 1910s, avant-garde writers were consistently using Tennyson as a 'convenient example' of what was wrong with the Victorian age.<sup>398</sup> Such opinions had become more or less uniform, at least in the work of the younger generation, by the end of the decade, and in many ways criticising Tennyson had become part of a rite of passage to maturity for Modernist writers. It seemed vital for them to throw off the shackles of the Victorian age, whose influence had continued to dominate English literature at least as late as 1920; witness the declaration by Wyndham Lewis in a 1914 *Blast* manifesto: 'years 1837 to 1900 / CURSE Abysmal inexcusable middle-class'.<sup>399</sup>

Writers of the period, most notably T. S. Eliot, were interested in establishing a rather different idea of poetic tradition. In Eliot's famous 1919 essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', he proposes that 'No poet, no artist of any art, has his complete meaning alone. His significance, his appreciation is the appreciation of his relation to the dead poets and artists. You cannot value him alone; you must set him, for contrast and comparison, among the dead.'<sup>400</sup> The 'dead poets and artists' identified by Eliot generally died hundreds of years before he was born or did not write in English: if we take the notes of *The Waste Land* as our guide, we can see that the influences Eliot wanted to acknowledge

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<sup>398</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Landor', in *Selected Prose 1909-1965* ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 384.

<sup>399</sup> Wyndham Lewis, 'Manifesto – I', *Blast* I (26th June, 1914), in *Blast Vol. I* ed. Wyndham Lewis (Santa Barbara: Black Sparrow Press, 1981), p. 18.

<sup>400</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. 15

include Dante, Ovid, Shakespeare, St. Augustine and Baudelaire. The absence of any English Romantic and Victorian poets is striking.

Despite this apparent lack of interest in English Romantic and Victorian literature, in order to establish himself as the inheritor of the 'tradition', Eliot needed to overcome the influence of the Victorians, whose influence still dominated English poetry in the 1910s. One of the ways he did this was through allusion. In 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar', first published in 1920, the first stanza contains a clear reference to Tennyson:

Burbank crossed a little bridge

Descending at a small hotel;

Princess Volupine arrived,

They were together, and he fell.<sup>401</sup>

We find 'They were together, and she fell' in Tennyson's revenge poem, 'The Sisters'.<sup>402</sup> This is not a particularly well-known Tennyson poem today, indeed it is not included in Christopher Ricks's 1989 *Selected Edition* of Tennyson. Ricks himself has summed up this instance of allusion as 'the contemptuous hailing-in of second-rate Tennyson: Eliot came together with Tennyson ("They were together, and she fell") so that Tennyson might fall ("They were together, and he fell")'.<sup>403</sup> According to Ricks, the 'compulsively allusive' poem relies on a reader's knowledge of Tennyson, but it uses this knowledge to show up the Victorian poet

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<sup>401</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Burbank with a Baedeker: Bleistein with a Cigar' lines 1-4, *The Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot* p. 40.

<sup>402</sup> 'The Sisters', line 4, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 398.

<sup>403</sup> Christopher Ricks, *T.S. Eliot and Prejudice* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), p. 258.

for what he is, according to Eliot in 1920 – second-rate, and at odds with the new poetry, represented by Eliot's dense, *difficult* verse.<sup>404</sup> There is no better example of this difficulty than the passage which we find at the end of Eliot's most famous poem, *The Waste Land*, and which is reproduced in the introduction to this thesis. In the middle of this dense mass of quotations, which looks so remote from anything published in the Victorian age (with the possible exception of Hopkins), Eliot quotes half a line of a song from *The Princess*. As I have noted, in his book on Eliot *The Invisible Poet*, Hugh Kenner privileges Eliot above Tennyson – thanks to Eliot's appropriation of his verse, 'Tennyson's swallow [...] flies away from an earthbound poet, grounded in an iron time'.<sup>405</sup> Tennyson would seem to be denied a prominent place in Eliot's 'tradition' by virtue of his being squarely a Victorian in contrast to Eliot's timelessness.

However, to conclude in this way would be to ignore the actual influence of Victorian literature on *The Waste Land*. One of the titles Eliot proposed for his poem was a quotation from Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, 'He do the police in different voices', and an early draft contained a sustained reference to Tennyson's 'Ulysses'.<sup>406</sup> 'Death by Water', the fourth book of *The Waste Land*, is only ten lines long in the final version of the poem, but the drafts (first published by his widow Valerie in 1971) show that it was originally a much longer account of a shipwreck situated, according to Valerie Eliot, 'off the New England coast

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>405</sup> Hugh Kenner, *The Invisible Poet: T.S. Eliot* (London: W. H. Allen, 1960), p. 153.

<sup>406</sup> T.S. Eliot, *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*, ed. Valerie Eliot (Orlando: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1971), p. 5. All quotations taken from this book are from the typed transcription of Eliot's text. Hereafter *Waste Land Drafts*.

where he had sailed in his youth'.<sup>407</sup> This is no tale of maritime heroism, however – one of the sailors is 'Staggering, or limping with a comic gonorrhea' [*sic*].<sup>408</sup> The sailors, who are used to being 'shaved, combed, scented, manicured' [*sic*], are unprepared for a reality of sailing; the storm. As the weather turns for the worse, they panic, and begin to argue:

'Her sail set to windward,'  
Said one of influence among the rest,  
'I'll see a dead man in an iron coffin,  
'With a crowbar row from here to Hell, before  
'This vessel sail to windward'.  
So the crew moaned; the sea with many voices  
Moaned all about us, under a rainy moon,  
While the suspended winter heaved and tugged,  
Stirring foul weather under the Hyades.<sup>409</sup>

The echoes of Tennyson's 'Ulysses' are clear:

The lights begin to twinkle from the rocks:  
The long day wanes: the slow moon climbs: the deep  
Moans round with many voices.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> Ibid., p. 128.

<sup>408</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid., p. 57.

<sup>410</sup> 'Ulysses' lines 55-7, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 565.

Just as he did as a student at Harvard, Eliot takes an image from Tennyson and renders it considerably darker than it seems in its original context. While it is 'the deep' that moans in 'Ulysses', in Eliot's poem it is the more immediate 'sea', which is joined in its moaning by 'the crew'. The chaotic atmosphere is increased by the next line, where we are told that the sea 'Moaned all about us'; this moaning is apparently both joined to, and dislocated from, that which the crew are making. This undermines the harmony of Tennyson's optimistic poem (he said that it 'gave my feeling about the need of going forward, and braving the struggle of life perhaps more simply than anything in *In Memoriam*').<sup>411</sup> There are also hints of 'Ulysses' in the description of the 'limping' sailor. He returns from an illicit tryst 'for the derision of his sober friends':

[...] as they

Are, he is, with 'much seen and much endured',

Foolish, impersonal, innocent or gay,

Liking to be shaved, combed, scented, manucured [*sic*].<sup>412</sup>

The phrase in quotation marks seems to be a reference to Tennyson's 'Ulysses', where the eponymous narrator says,

I cannot rest from travel: I will drink

Life to the lees: all times I have enjoyed

Greatly, have suffered greatly, both with those

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<sup>411</sup> *Memoir* Volume I, p. 92.

<sup>412</sup> *Waste Land Drafts*, p. 55

That loved me, and alone [...].<sup>413</sup>

Eliot's use of quotation marks in the misquotation of Tennyson might show that the 'drunken ruffian' sailor is acquainted with 'Ulysses', and imagines himself to adhere to the image of sailor as classical adventurer. The intended effect requires the reader to be aware of, and appreciative of, the earlier poem in order to work fully. One is reminded of Ricks's comment that 'the alluder hopes that the reader will recognise something'.<sup>414</sup>

This is no case of Eliot merely quoting 'second-rate' Tennyson in order to overcome the authority of the Victorian laureate – since 'Ulysses' was published in 1842, it has been considered one of his finest poems, and in the 1920s it was the second most anthologised of all his poems.<sup>415</sup> It is unlikely that Ezra Pound, whose amendments to Eliot's drafts were followed in almost every instance, would have deleted the extended 'Death by Water' sequence purely on the basis of its including such clear references to Tennyson. The passages concerning the shipwreck were probably excluded because they consist of a self-contained narrative, and also as a result of their setting – Eliot needed recognition from the *English* poetry world for *The Waste Land*, so the American-set 'Death by Water' may well have been excised for this reason. However, it does seem that there is an attempt at least to conceal, if not to delete, the references in *The Waste Land* to literature written in English less than an hundred or so years before 1923. Eliot abandoned the title 'He Do the Police in Different Voices' after Pound's input, and

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<sup>413</sup> 'Ulysses' lines 6-9, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 562.

<sup>414</sup> Ricks, *Allusion to the Poets*, p. 1.

<sup>415</sup> See Appendix.

was also advised to change the epigraph to the poem, which as it stood was a passage from Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* which ends with Kurtz's 'cry' of 'The horror! the horror!'<sup>416</sup> The correspondence about Conrad ran thus:

Pound: 'I doubt if Conrad is weighty enough to stand the citation.'

Eliot: 'Do you mean not use the Conrad quote or simply not put Conrad's name to it? It is much the most appropriate I can find, and somewhat elucidative.'

Pound: '[Do as you like about] Conrad; who am I to grudge him his laurel crown?'<sup>417</sup>

Valerie Eliot's notes inform us that, once Pound had delivered this slight on Conrad, who was still alive, 'The passage was omitted'.<sup>418</sup>

This policy of omission also appears to have informed Eliot's attitude toward the poems in his manuscript collection *Inventions of the March Hare*, which were written between 1909 and 1917 and were first published, edited by Christopher Ricks, in 1996. Despite his apparent willingness to exclude allusions to Tennyson, the presence of the Victorian poet is apparent. Eliot's poem 'Silence' contains an evocation of Tennyson:

Along the city streets

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<sup>416</sup> *Waste Land Drafts*, p. 3.

<sup>417</sup> Pound to T.S. Eliot, 24<sup>th</sup> December 1921, *The Letters of Ezra Pound 1907-1941* ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber & Faber 1951) p. 234; T. S. Eliot to Pound, ?January 1922, *ibid.*, p. 236; Pound to T. S. Eliot, ?January 1922, *ibid.*, p. 237. The actual phrase is 'ditto', with 'do as you like' being used earlier in the letter.

<sup>418</sup> *Waste Land Drafts*, p. 125

It is still high tide,  
Yet the garrulous waves of life  
Shrink and divide [...].<sup>419</sup>

Ricks links this to the famous verse from *In Memoriam*, which begins:

There rolls the deep where grew the tree.  
O earth, what changes hast thou seen!  
There where the long street roars, hath been  
The stillness of the central sea.<sup>420</sup>

Eliot takes the central image of the first stanza of Tennyson's poem – the submerged city – and makes it both calmer, as the 'seas of experience' are for him 'suddenly still', and kinetic, as 'At such peace I am terrified'.<sup>421</sup> Compare this with the ending of Tennyson's poem which reads

But in my spirit will I dwell,  
And dream my dream, and hold it true;  
For tho' my lips may breathe adieu,  
I cannot think the thing farewell.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>419</sup> 'Silence' lines 1-4, *Inventions of the March Hare* ed. Christopher Ricks (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), p. 18.

<sup>420</sup> *In Memoriam* CXXIII, lines 1-4, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 973.

<sup>421</sup> 'Silence' lines 10-15, *Inventions of the March Hare*, p. 18.

<sup>422</sup> *In Memoriam* CXXIII, lines 9-12, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 973.



It would seem that the narrator of Eliot's poem has lost even the possibility of finding solace in experience and memory, at the point when 'the seas of experience' 'are suddenly still'. The 'peace' of Tennyson's dwelling in his spirit is of no solace to Eliot's narrator, as for him 'There is nothing else beside' the terrifying peace.<sup>423</sup>

Eliot did not publish any of the *March Hare* poems (they only appeared in book form in 1996), and yet by 1925 he appears to have begun to acknowledge the influences not considered 'weighty' enough only a few years previously, feeling confident enough of the importance of *Heart of Darkness* to include a quotation from it ('Mistah Kurtz – he dead') as the epigraph to 'The Hollow Men'.<sup>424</sup> A vague echo of Conrad remains in *The Waste Land*, in the following passage:

I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.<sup>425</sup>

B. C. Southam, in *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot*, has argued that the most important earlier example of the 'fear' of dust for Eliot comes from the Bible, but goes on to cite Conrad's 1902 novel *Youth* and his short story 'The Return' (1898), the fourth Meditation of John Donne's *Devotions*

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<sup>423</sup> 'Silence' line 16, *Inventions of the March Hare*, p. 18.

<sup>424</sup> *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 81.

<sup>425</sup> *The Waste Land* lines 27-30, *ibid.*, p. 61.

*Upon Emergent Occasions* (1624), and Tennyson's 'Maud' (1855) as other potential sources for the phrase.<sup>426</sup> Eliot does not acknowledge the allusion in his notes, but it is likely that he had 'The Return' in mind: witness Conrad's 'He was afraid with that penetrating fear that seems in the very middle of a beat, to turn one's heart into a handful of dust'.<sup>427</sup> The neurotic metropolitan relationship witnessed in the second part of Eliot's 'A Game of Chess' also seems close to that in Conrad's novel. As we have already seen, part of the inspiration for the passage from Conrad almost certainly came from 'Maud', and the repetition of the word 'beat' (which can also be found in the above quotation from 'The Return') is echoed in the earlier line in *The Waste Land*, 'you know only / A heap of broken images, where the sun beats'.<sup>428</sup> In a section called 'The Burial of the Dead', where we also read of 'that corpse you planted last year in your garden', the references to Tennyson's vivid scene of being buried alive are more than a simple coincidence.<sup>429</sup> The atmosphere of frantic living (and speech) in the face of an apparently attractive death is evoked in both the second part of 'Maud' and 'The Burial of the Dead', and evinces a far more linear idea of tradition than the one suggested by Eliot in his famous works of criticism and the notes to his poem. It is worth noting that he acknowledges the sources of neither 'a handful of dust' nor 'O swallow swallow' in his notes to the final version of the poem, despite offering references for almost all the other 'fragments' surrounding the latter in the last stanza.

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<sup>426</sup> B.C. Southam, *A Student's Guide to the Selected Poems of T. S. Eliot* (London: Faber & Faber, 1994), pp. 144-5.

<sup>427</sup> Joseph Conrad, 'The Return', in *Almayer's Folly and Tales of Unrest* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1947), p. 135.

<sup>428</sup> *The Waste Land* lines 21-2, *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 61

<sup>429</sup> *The Waste Land* line 71, *ibid.*, p. 63.

As the example of Conrad shows, once Eliot felt that he had been accepted into the English canon by virtue of his radical rethinking of tradition and the impact of *The Waste Land*, he felt more at liberty to acknowledge his influences. But what endures when Eliot is taught at schools and universities in the twenty-first century is the initial, deceptive idea of a 'tradition' which does not include Tennyson. As Harold Bloom has noted, 'Eliot's strength is felt now when we read [...] "Maud: A Monodrama", and find ourselves believing that [it is] influenced by *The Waste Land*'.<sup>430</sup>

#### James Joyce and Henry Williamson: Dreams of Fair Women

Just as the presence of Tennyson in *The Waste Land* has been overlooked by the majority of critics, so Barbara Hardy has noted of Joyce's *Ulysses* that 'One of the most interesting Tennysonian titles may not be universally acknowledged as Tennysonian' – despite the widespread fame of both Joyce's novel and Tennyson's poem, hardly any critics have connected them.<sup>431</sup> Joyce appears an unlikely novelist to be influenced by Tennyson, based on the disdain showed towards the poet by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, and indeed *Ulysses* contains several examples of outright hostility to the poet, mainly in the episodes focusing on Stephen Dedalus's journey around Dùn Laoghaire and Dublin. At the end of 'Proteus', the end of the first part of the novel as a whole, Dedalus remembers that 'next when it is Tuesday will be the

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<sup>430</sup> 'Introduction' to *Modern Critical Views: T.S. Eliot* ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1985), p. 2.

<sup>431</sup> Barbara Hardy, *Tennyson and the Novelists* (Lincoln: Tennyson Society, 1993), p. 4.

longest day', which reminds him of Tennyson's 'May Queen': 'Of all the glad new year, mother, the rum tum tiddledy tum. Lawn Tennyson, gentleman poet. *Già*. For the old hag with the yellow teeth'.<sup>432</sup> The reduction of Tennyson's poetry to 'rum tum tiddledy tum' fits in with the young Stephen's description of Tennyson as a 'rhymester' (in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*) as opposed to a true poet, and the extract also includes 'Lawn Tennyson, gentleman poet', a favourite pun of Stephen's, which occurs several times in the novel (The pun is not as original as Stephen's gleeful repetition suggests – it first appeared on the 15<sup>th</sup> of December 1883 in the *Illustrated London News*.)<sup>433</sup> Stephen repeats it while debating the sex life of Shakespeare with his friends in the 'Scylla and Charybdis' episode, speculating that the playwright slept with 'Harry of six wives' daughter. And other lady friends from neighbour seats as Lawn Tennyson, gentleman poet, sings.<sup>434</sup> We also find the character 'Lord Tennyson' in the hallucinatory 'Circe' episode, where he is described in brackets as '(gentleman poet, in Union Jack blazer and cricket flannels, bareheaded, flowingbearded)'.<sup>435</sup> This is generally held to be the most direct reference to Tennyson in Joyce's fiction, and as Vincent J. Cheng notes, the image combines 'two elements of the genteel English establishment, lawn tennis and the Poet Laureate'.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>432</sup> James Joyce, *Ulysses*, ed. Hans Walter Gabler with Wolfhard Steppe and Claus Melchior (London: Bodley Head, 2001), p. 42. Hereafter *Ulysses*.

<sup>433</sup> *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, p. 103; See *Lives of Victorian Literary Figures I: Eliot, Dickens and Tennyson by their Contemporaries Vol. 3: Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, ed. Matthew Bevis (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2003), p. 432.

<sup>434</sup> *Ulysses*, p. 166. A reference to *The Princess*, Prologue, lines 97-8. *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 746.

<sup>435</sup> *Ulysses*, p. 480.

<sup>436</sup> Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 205.

In Dublin in the 1900s, lawn tennis (and 'English' sport in general) was a pressing political issue, as can be seen in the 'Cyclops' episode of *Ulysses*, which takes the form of a pub discussion involving, among others, Leopold Bloom (the 'hero' of the novel) and a character called 'the citizen', who is based on Michael Cusack.<sup>437</sup> Cusack was one of the founder members of the Gaelic Athletic Association, which sought to promote Irish sports, primarily hurling, Gaelic football, and track and field athletics, at the expense of 'English' pursuits, for example cricket, lawn tennis and rugby.<sup>438</sup> As Patrick J. Ledden has noted, 'It is in the discussion of sport that Bloom finally offends the citizen beyond recovery' – specifically, in his repeated praise for lawn tennis, which he believes is good for 'agility and training the eye', while the other men in the pub are talking about the Keogh-Bennett boxing match.<sup>439</sup> With the context of tennis (and cricket) in 1900s Ireland in mind, the implied association between Tennyson and 'English' sport takes on a deeper significance, only strengthened by the fact that the poet's grandson, Lionel, was a test cricketer for England between 1913 and 1921.

Tennyson is thus an intrinsic part of what Tom Paulin has labelled 'The British Presence in *Ulysses*'.<sup>440</sup> The Victorian is associated with the British in Ireland not just through word association and biographical facts, but also by virtue of the occasional anti-Celtic sentiments of his verse. The clearest example

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<sup>437</sup> *Ulysses*, p. 241

<sup>438</sup> See Patrick J. Ledden, 'Bloom, Lawn Tennis, and the Gaelic Athletic Association', *James Joyce Quarterly* 36.3 (Spring 1999), p. 631.

<sup>439</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 630; *Ulysses*, p. 261

<sup>440</sup> Tom Paulin, 'The British Presence in *Ulysses*', in *Writing to the Moment* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), pp. 18-27.

of this comes in *In Memoriam*, where he claims that Arthur Henry Hallam possessed

A love of freedom rarely felt,  
Of freedom in her regal seat  
Of England; not the schoolboy heat,  
The blind hysterics of the Celt [...].<sup>441</sup>

This would have been interpreted by Stephen as a further example of Tennyson's status as the poetic representative of the oppressive British state, hence his idea of the Laureate writing 'For the old hag with the yellow teeth' – Queen Victoria.<sup>442</sup> Left with only these examples, one could conclude that Joyce is as set against the poet as Ezra Pound, albeit for different reasons.

However, the Tennysonian presence in the Stephen Dedalus-dominated passages of *Ulysses* is countered by the references to the poet we find in the episodes of the novel concerning Leopold Bloom. We have already witnessed his enthusiasm for tennis, and this is backed up by an appreciation of cricket: he remembers that 'Captain Buller broke a window in the Kildare Street Club with a slog to square leg'.<sup>443</sup> He knows the fielding positions, and this even-handed appreciation of English culture is continued in his opinion of Tennyson. He thinks about the laureate's poems in the Concert Room of the Ormond Hotel, in the 'Sirens' episode, where he listens to Richie Goulding sing 'All is Lost Now', and

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<sup>441</sup> *In Memoriam* CIX lines 13-16, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 962.

<sup>442</sup> *Ulysses*, p. 42.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

the singer later tells Bloom 'of the night he [...] heard him, Si Dedalus, sing' in Ned Lambert's house.<sup>444</sup> This causes Bloom to think, 'Brothers-in-law. Relations. We never speak as we pass by. Rift in the lute I think'.<sup>445</sup> The reference is to Tennyson's poem 'The Rift in the Lute', a song in the 'Merlin and Vivien' story in *Idylls of the King*. Bloom puns on the title – as the Gouldings are a musical family, there is a literal 'rift' in the 'lute', their musical tradition (the title of this poem is also frequently punned on in the novels of P. G. Wodehouse and in Saki's short story 'The Jestings of Arlington Stringham'). However, at the same time as Bloom listens to the singer, his wife Molly is committing adultery with Blazes Boylan – and Tennyson's song is one of deception, the devious Vivien attempting to prove to Merlin that she is trustworthy. The 'rift in the lute' idea may be a pun which Bloom finds amusing with regard to Richie Goulding – he later calls him 'Ritchie rift in the lute' – but it masks a deeper concern about Molly's infidelity.<sup>446</sup> Another Tennyson poem which occurs to Bloom, this time in the 'Eumaeus' episode, is 'Locksley Hall'. He thinks about the Hill of Howth:

while Howth with its historic associations and otherwise, Silken  
Thomas, Grace O'Malley, George IV, rhododendrons several  
hundred feet above sealevel was a favourite haunt with all sorts  
and conditions of men especially in the spring when young men's

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<sup>444</sup> Ibid., p. 227.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>446</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

fancy, though it had its own toll of deaths by falling off the cliffs by design or accidentally [...].<sup>447</sup>

Line 20 of 'Locksley Hall' reads 'In the Spring a young man's fancy lightly turns to thoughts of love', and the strong rhyme scheme of the poem is echoed in the half-rhyme of 'fancy' and 'accidentally' in the above passage.<sup>448</sup> At first this seems a throwaway word association, but even the word 'throwaway' is resonant in *Ulysses*, as Bloom, talking about his newspaper, repeatedly tells Bantam Lyons he was going to 'throw it away', which Lyons interprets as a betting tip; later the men in the pub grow jealous, as a horse, 'Throwaway', wins its race.<sup>449</sup> The Hill of Howth is memorably the scene of 'the day we were lying among the rhododendrons' in Molly Bloom's reverie, where she decided 'as well him [Bloom] as another' and as she remembers their kiss we read the final 'Yes' of the novel.<sup>450</sup> The fancy of both Molly and Leopold Bloom lightly turns to thoughts of love when they consider the Hill of Howth; Tennyson is saved from the inward-looking, bitter opinions of Stephen Dedalus by the more balanced, if perhaps unconscious, associations we find in the episodes involving Leopold Bloom.

A less radical novelist of the 1920s, at least in terms of form, was Henry Williamson. His semi-autobiographical novel, *The Dream of Fair Women*, published in 1924, is one of the first novels to deal explicitly with the trauma suffered by soldiers after they experienced the trenches. The plot concerns a former soldier, William Maddison, who moves to a dilapidated cottage in the

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<sup>447</sup> Ibid., p. 513.

<sup>448</sup> 'Locksley Hall', line 20, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 691.

<sup>449</sup> *Ulysses*, p. 70.

<sup>450</sup> Ibid., pp. 643-4.



West of England on his return from the front. The war has not finished, but he has been discharged, and plans to write a book inspired by *The Story of My Heart* by Richard Jefferies. While staying in the run-down cottage he comes into contact with a woman, Evelyn Fairfax, with whom he has a short affair while her husband is away in the Army. Anne Williamson has claimed that Evelyn is based on a woman Henry Williamson called 'Mabs B', with whom he was infatuated in 1919, who had a reputation for "'fast" behaviour' and appeared to be a 'devourer of men'.<sup>451</sup> The truth of the character of the real woman is open to question, but there is no doubt that Williamson paints a fairly unsympathetic portrait of Evelyn Fairfax, who leads Maddison on before spurning him. He follows her to her home in 'Findleston' (a thinly-disguised Folkestone), where he befriends her husband and looks after her daughter, all the while clinging to the hope of a romantic reunion with Evelyn. But the novel does not end in a positive way, but rather with alcohol-soaked dances to celebrate Peace Day, Evelyn incapable of fidelity to any one man, and Maddison ultimately left alone. The title of the book is a clear reference to Tennyson (and Chaucer), but Maddison's bookshelves conspicuously lack any copies of the Victorian poet's work (he reads Blake, Shelley, Keats, Hardy, de la Mare and Sassoon). In a later edition of the novel, Williamson elaborated on Maddison's tastes, writing that his regard for Sassoon is based on the idea of him as 'a poet who was true because he was true to himself, a poet writhing in agony in the toils of the boa-constrictor of mass-human un-understanding,' and one could assume that he would be unlikely to admire

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<sup>451</sup> Anne Williamson, *Henry Williamson: Tarka and the Last Romantic* (Stroud: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995), p. 67.

Tennyson as similarly 'true'.<sup>452</sup> The title of the novel seems ironic, the 'dream of fair women' being a singular dream which is completely undone by the reality of the skittish and unfaithful Evelyn. If this is not a specific criticism of Tennyson, it is clear that the world, as perceived even in relatively traditional novels like that of Williamson, appears to have moved on from the more stable one in which Tennyson was writing. And Maddison is like other heroes of fiction dealing with the Great War in his literary tastes. Christopher Tietjens, in Ford Madox Ford's series of novels *Parade's End*, claims only ever to read Byron and is uninterested in Victorian poetry.<sup>453</sup>

#### Virginia Woolf and 'Poor Old Tennyson'

In her novel *Jacob's Room*, often cited as the third key work published in the *annus mirabilis* of 1922 (along with *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land*), Virginia Woolf creates a portrait of Jacob Flanders, a young man just entering adulthood, whose own fate is prophesied by his surname – the novel ends with him dead on the battlefields of the Western front. Jacob leaves Cambridge in 1909 and we witness his life in London, including his frequent conversations about music and art. One such conversation, which is reported as though it were overheard in public and occasionally drowned out by background noise, appears to concern composers and poets from the past. Jacob asks his friend Bonamy 'What about Beethoven?' and later we see another snatch of Jacob's side of the conversation, an admission that 'Bonamy knows practically everything – not more about

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<sup>452</sup> Henry Williamson, *The Dream of Fair Women* (London: Faber & Faber, 1968), p. 156.

<sup>453</sup> Ford Madox Ford, *Parade's End* ed. Max Saunders (London: Penguin, 2002), p. 16.

English literature than I do', and then the retort, 'I rather suspect you're talking rot, Bonamy. In spite of what you say, poor old Tennyson...'.<sup>454</sup> As this conversation is meant to be taking place in 1909, it is clear that the 'reaction' A. C. Bradley identified had certainly started by this point, at least in the 1909 which Woolf remembered. Jacob's epithet for Tennyson – 'poor old' – expresses both a light-hearted admiration of the poet and an implicit acceptance that he is 'old' and has been subjected to enough abuse to be pitied.

Much of Woolf's 1920s output deals, as did *Jacob's Room*, with the impact of the Great War, not least her 1928 essay *A Room Of One's Own*. 'Certainly it wasn't a shock (to women in particular with their illusions about education, and so on) to see the faces of our rulers in the light of shell-fire. So ugly they looked – German, English, French – so stupid'.<sup>455</sup> This echoes a later diary entry where she notes 'how simple, how clear, how untroubled' her parents were.<sup>456</sup> The apparent breakdown in the old order echoes the difference discerned in the atmosphere of genteel 'Oxbridge' luncheon parties (such as the one at which this particular episode in her essay is set) before and after the war. Woolf observes that 'before the war at a luncheon party like this people would have said precisely the same things but they would have sounded different, because in those days they were accompanied by a sort of humming noise, not articulate, but musical, exciting, which changed the value of the words themselves'.<sup>457</sup> She goes on to ask, 'Could one set that humming noise to words?' She decides that one could

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<sup>454</sup> Virginia Woolf, *Jacob's Room* ed. Sue Roe (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 60.

<sup>455</sup> Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* in *A Room of One's Own and Three Guineas* ed. Michèle Barrett (London: Penguin, 1993), p. 13. Hereafter *A Room of One's Own*.

<sup>456</sup> Entry for 22 December 1940 in *The Diary of Virginia Woolf Volume V: 1936-1941* ed. Anne Olivier Bell and Andrew McNeillie (London: Hogarth Press, 1984), p. 345.

<sup>457</sup> *A Room of One's Own*, p. 11.

do so 'with the help of the poets' and so takes up a book which 'lay next to me', from which she reads part of Tennyson's 'Maud':

There has fallen a splendid tear  
From the passion-flower at the gate.  
She is coming, my dove, my dear;  
She is coming, my life, my fate;  
The red rose cries, 'She is near, she is near';  
And the white rose weeps, 'She is late';  
The larkspur listens, 'I hear, I hear';  
And the lily whispers, 'I wait.'

If this is 'what men hummed at luncheon parties before the war', Woolf goes on to suggest that women hummed the first verse of Christina Rossetti's poem 'A Birthday'.<sup>458</sup> She says of the two,

What poets [...], what poets they were! [...] The very reason why that poetry excites one to such abandonment, such rapture, is that it celebrates some feeling that one used to have (at luncheon parties before the war perhaps), so that one responds easily, familiarly, without troubling to check the feeling, or to compare it with any that one has now.<sup>459</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> Ibid.

<sup>459</sup> Ibid., p. 12-13.

Victorian verse is read for escapism, and Woolf's narrator prefers such verse to 'the living poets' because it is firmly couched in the past, as opposed to the work of contemporaries who 'express a feeling that is actually being made and torn out of us at the moment'.<sup>460</sup> The phrase 'torn out of us' is important here. If Victorian verse can be summed up by these two metrically tight extracts, its *power* has to pale in comparison with modern poetry, which has the capacity to 'tear' feelings out of the reader, rather than 'celebrate' an earlier feeling.

Woolf does not stop here, but continues: 'lay the blame where one will, on whom one will, the illusion which inspired Tennyson and Christina Rossetti to sing so passionately about the coming of their loves is far rarer now than then. One has only to read, to look, to listen, to remember. But why say "blame"? Why, if it was an illusion, not praise the catastrophe, whatever it was, that destroyed illusion and put truth in its place? For truth... those dots mark the spots where, in search of truth, I missed the turning up to Fernham'.<sup>461</sup> Woolf uses humour here to mask the true impact of her ideas. As a committed pacifist, she cannot be praising the war itself – witness the elegiac tone of novels such as *Jacob's Room*, and the deep sense of loss they evoke for the young men who died in Flanders. And yet the shattering of the 'illusions' both expressed in, and created by nineteenth-century poetry – which, for Woolf, had at least a symbolic role in the culture which led to the disaster of the Great War – becomes a positive step towards her generation emerging as capable of producing true works of art.

On reading *A Room of One's Own* (or hearing it delivered as a lecture) in 1929, the up-to-date Woolf enthusiast could not have helped being struck by the

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<sup>460</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>461</sup> Ibid., pp. 13-14.

focus on Tennyson which this work shares with *To the Lighthouse*, published two years earlier. In the first part of the novel, 'The Window', we find Mr Ramsay, a fictionalised version of Woolf's father, and head of the extended holidaying household, pacing around the garden of his summer-house reciting Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade'. The recital is heated, and frequently intrudes on the peace of other characters, not least his wife. She overhears him saying 'Someone had blundered', and dwells on the phrase:

She gave meaning to words which she had held meaningless in her mind for a long stretch of time. 'Someone had blundered' – Fixing her short-sighted eyes upon her husband, who was now bearing down upon her, she gazed steadily until his closeness revealed to her (the jingle mated itself in her head) that something had happened, someone had blundered. But she could not for the life of her think what.

He shivered; he quivered. All his vanity, all his satisfaction in his own splendour, riding fell as a thunderbolt, fierce as a hawk at the head of his men through the valley of death, had been shattered, destroyed. Stormed at by shot and shell, boldly we rode and well, flashed through the valley of death, volleyed and thundered – straight into Lily Briscoe and William Bankes. He quivered; he shivered.<sup>462</sup>

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<sup>462</sup> *To the Lighthouse*, ed. Stella McNicol (London: Penguin, 1992), pp. 35-6. Hereafter *To the Lighthouse*.

Woolf's distinction between husband and wife is made in the paragraph break. Mr. Ramsay's reveries of heroism, manifested in poetic 'splendour', are a mere 'jingle' in his wife's ears. 'Mated itself in her head' is testament to her ambivalence towards Tennyson's work, as the line repeats over and over, negating the progress undoubtedly intended in the poem's distinctive rhythm. Shuli Barzilai says of this:

The distinguished professor of philosophy and *pater familias* is diminished by the humorously deflating contrast between his domestic situation and the content of the poem; the elevated, histrionic tone of 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and its galloping dactylic rhythms are ridiculed, or, to a great extent, held in check by the context.<sup>463</sup>

Once Mr. Ramsay has left the scene, we are left certain that Barzilai's interpretation is in tune with Woolf's own intentions. Mrs. Ramsay thinks, 'how extraordinarily his note had changed! [...] It sounded ridiculous – "Someone had blundered" – said like that, almost as a question, without any conviction, melodiously'; she 'could not help smiling' at hearing it.<sup>464</sup> Few readers could avoid joining her. She understands her husband's serious attachment to the verse, but cannot agree with him on its merits, or indeed on its seriousness.

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<sup>463</sup> Shuli Barzilai, 'The Politics of Quotation in *To the Lighthouse*: Mrs. Woolf Resites Mr. Tennyson and Mr. Cowper', in *Literature and Psychology* 41.3 (1995), p. 25.

<sup>464</sup> *To the Lighthouse*, p. 38.

This is a moderately happy balance between two contrasting views of art, and yet not everyone in the novel is as tolerant of Mr Ramsay. Lily Briscoe, who is painting outside the house, encounters him:

He almost knocked her easel over, coming down upon her with his hands waving, shouting out 'Boldly we rode and well', but, mercifully, he turned sharp, and rode off, to die gloriously she supposed upon the heights of Balaclava. Never was anybody at once so ridiculous and so alarming.<sup>465</sup>

The only positive for Lily of Mr Ramsay's poetic reverie is that it means he will not 'stand still and look at her picture', which she 'could not have endured'.<sup>466</sup> His view of art is anchored in the Victorian past – the poem was almost fifty years old when *To the Lighthouse* is set, and almost seventy-five when the novel was published – and yet, as we saw in *A Room of One's Own*, the new generation of artists, represented by Lily Briscoe in *To the Lighthouse*, was only finding the confidence in the 1920s to emerge fully from the previous generation's shadow, thanks to the lingering presence of writers such as James Main Dixon, who still adhered to Carlyle's principle that 'Universal History [...] is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here'.<sup>467</sup> And *To the Lighthouse* itself is testament to the capacity for art of Woolf's generation, which truly emerged as an artistic force in the 1920s. The image of Mr Ramsay loudly, *seriously*, reciting

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<sup>465</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>466</sup> Ibid.

<sup>467</sup> Thomas Carlyle, *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* in *Sartor Resartus and On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History* (London: Macmillan, 1901), p. 257.



Tennyson as he stumbles into his houseguests and even his wife is undoubtedly funny, but it is also very serious. The full significance of the recitals only really comes to light in the 'Time Passes' section of the novel, where we read that, some years after the events described in the first part of the book, 'twenty or thirty young men were blown up in France, among them Andrew Ramsay'.<sup>468</sup>

With the atrocities of Great War in the background, Mr Ramsay's recitals suddenly appear a lot less humorous. Witness the second verse of the poem.

'Forward, the Light Brigade!'  
Was there a man dismayed?  
Not though the soldier knew  
Some one had blundered:  
Their's not to make reply,  
Their's not to reason why,  
Their's but to do and die:  
Into the valley of Death  
Rode the six hundred.<sup>469</sup>

In the context of the unprecedented losses suffered by Woolf's generation in the Great War, this leaves a bitter taste in the mouth. There were many similar 'blunders' in Flanders, not least Field Marshal Haig's decision to try and take the crest of the Ypres ridges in 1917, leading to the loss of at least 70,000 men.<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>468</sup> *To the Lighthouse*, p. 145.

<sup>469</sup> 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', lines 9-17, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1035.

<sup>470</sup> See John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), pp. 381-395.

The lines 'Their's not to make reply, / Their's not to reason why, / Their's but to do and die' are easily applicable to the grim subjection of ordinary soldiers to the whims of their superiors in the first world war, and yet the overall tone of the poem does not sit easily 'in the light of shellfire' – Tennyson's rhythm extols the appeal of combat, and his conclusion is undoubtedly positive:

When can their glory fade?  
O the wild charge they made!  
All the world wondered.  
Honour the charge they made!  
Honour the Light Brigade,  
Noble six hundred!<sup>471</sup>

The image of Mr Ramsay reciting the poem over and over again, indulging in reveries of tragic martial heroism while pacing around his summer garden, can thus be seen as an attack on the assumptions about combat of the late Victorian generation. Reading the poem out of its original context (about which Jerome McGann wrote his admirable essay 'Tennyson and the Histories of Criticism' in 1982),<sup>472</sup> Mr. Ramsay and his peers interpreted it as a positive depiction of resignation to orders from above, and the glory of dying for one's country in a manner that can easily be avoided. In her writing in the 1920s, Woolf depicted

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<sup>471</sup> 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', lines 50-55, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1036.

<sup>472</sup> See Jerome McGann, 'Tennyson and the Histories of Criticism', *The Beauty of Inflections* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 173-203.

Tennyson's poetry as frivolous and almost ridiculous because she thought that its being taken seriously was deadly for her own generation.

Unlike Andrew Ramsay, Clifford Chatterley in D. H. Lawrence's 1928 novel *Lady Chatterley's Lover* did not die in the trenches, but he nonetheless returns in a wheelchair, impotent. His wife, Connie, leaves him for his groundskeeper, Mellors, who reveals to her ultimately 'what liars poets and everybody were! They made one think one wanted sentiment. When what one supremely wanted was this piercing, consuming, rather awful sensuality.'<sup>473</sup> When she leaves her husband, and he discovers who her lover is, he becomes nearly hysterical and is comforted by his housekeeper, Mrs Bolton, who sees hysteria as 'insanity':

Hysteria is dangerous: and she was a nurse, it was her duty to pull him out. Any attempt to rouse his manhood and his pride would only make him worse: for his manhood was dead, temporarily if not finally. He would only squirm softer and softer, like a worm, and become more dislocated.

The only thing was to release his self-pity. Like the lady in Tennyson, he must weep or he must die.<sup>474</sup>

This is a reference to Tennyson's lyric 'Home they brought her warrior dead' from *The Princess*. The lyric runs,

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<sup>473</sup> D. H. Lawrence, *Lady Chatterley's Lover* ed. Michael Squires (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 247.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 290.

Home they brought her warrior dead:

She nor swooned, nor uttered cry:

All her maidens, watching, said,

“She must weep or she will die.”

Then they praised him, soft and low,

Called him worthy to be loved,

Truest friend and noblest foe;

Yet she neither spoke nor moved.

Stole a maiden from her place,

Lightly to the warrior stept,

Took the face-cloth from the face;

Yet she neither moved nor wept.

Rose a nurse of ninety years,

Set his child upon her knee—

Like summer tempest came her tears—

“Sweet my child, I live for thee.”<sup>475</sup>

It could be the case that Mrs. Bolton does not know the context of the lines she is quoting, but nonetheless this is a painful poem to be cited at this point; Connie is pregnant by Mellors, and Clifford is impotent. Ultimately this is a reversal of

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<sup>475</sup> *The Princess V.VI, The Poems of Tennyson*, pp. 817-8.

gender – Clifford should be the warrior, and indeed went to war, but he has returned maimed rather than dead (in any case, according to Mrs. Bolton, he is the lady of the poem); he has no child to live for, and has gone so far as to suggest that any affair is acceptable if he can keep the offspring as his heir. The passage continues with Clifford likened to the ‘infant’ we have seen in Lawrence’s earlier novels:

The curious thing was that when this child-man which Clifford now was and which he had been becoming for years emerged into the world, it was much sharper and keener than the real man he used to be.<sup>476</sup>

This underlines Lawrence’s idea that human self-consciousness, represented by the ‘infant crying in the night’ of is futile. For Lawrence, an acceptance of childishness can actually help one’s progress in society, albeit at the expense of exposure to true love, feelings and desires.

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<sup>476</sup> *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, p. 291.

### The Young Critics: Hugh l'Anson Fausset and Harold Nicolson

The influence of the war can also be discerned in critical writing about Tennyson. Although Hugh l'Anson Fausset's 1923 study, *Tennyson: A Modern Portrait* is not quite as 'modern' a portrait, in stylistic terms, as *Jacob's Room* or *To The Lighthouse*, his sentiments about the poet are even more extreme than those of Woolf. He claims that early in their careers, faced with an apparently changed world of industry and commerce, Tennyson's generation (which seems to be comprised, for Fausset, of the Cambridge Apostles of the early 1830s) decided that 'Poetry should no longer seek to free men, but to entertain and sanctify their leisure; science and commercialism were to occupy their business hours'.<sup>477</sup> The only Tennyson poems which Fausset endorses are those published in *Poems* (1842), because 'they show the whole range of Tennyson's powers, and the first stage of that conflict between genius and the commonplace, which was to end in so overwhelming victory for the latter'.<sup>478</sup> He is most scathing when he comes to the 'public' verse Tennyson wrote after his 1850 appointment to the laureateship. With 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', 'he had won the heart of those mild and respectable masses who nourish in secret dreams of violence and gallantry, and look to a poet to rattle the sabre for them, and to relieve drab days by flaunting in perfect security the banners of war'.<sup>479</sup> Poems like 'Riflemen Form!' appealed to

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<sup>477</sup> Hugh l'Anson Fausset, *Tennyson: A Modern Portrait* (London: Selwyn & Blount, 1923) p. 69. Hereafter Fausset.

<sup>478</sup> Ibid., p. 99

<sup>479</sup> Ibid., p. 186

'nervous Victorians' who 'slept easier [...] in their beds, happily ignorant of the nightmares they were preparing for their posterity'.<sup>480</sup>

Despite the claims of some critics in the 1920s that there was a widespread 'indifference' to Tennyson in the early twentieth century, the very posterity of his poetry – the end result of the values expressed therein, and their enduring appeal – is at the centre of Fausset's condemnation of the poet.<sup>481</sup> He ends his book:

The result of [Tennyson's] idle high-mindedness was the catastrophe of savagery and folly which we have known, and the decimating of a generation, young in hope and generosity, which had of itself willed no such things.

Once, listening to the choristers in the Abbey, whither he was brought at last to rest, Tennyson said, 'It is beautiful, but what empty and awful mockery if there were no God.' On the fields of Flanders there was no God, and the mockery and squalor of it all was relieved by no white-robed Choristers, voicing a consolatory strain.<sup>482</sup>

Fausset's sentiments were echoed by C. Collier Abbott, who observed in a review that 'When we read the patriotic poems in the light that has come to us from the late war, we understand that a man of such extreme limitations, such

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<sup>480</sup> Ibid., p. 219.

<sup>481</sup> See the 'Foreword' to C. H. O. Scaife's *The Poetry of Alfred Tennyson: An Essay in Appreciation* (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1930).

<sup>482</sup> Fausset, p. 302.

music-hall sentiments, so essentially a member of the governing classes, could not but lack the wider sympathies which were essential to some of the poems he was to attempt'.<sup>483</sup>

A slim volume, Fausset's book did not survive as well as another critical work on Tennyson published in the same year, by Harold Nicolson, despite several contemporary reviews grouping the two critics together in a common concern 'with redeeming the fame of the poet of "In Memoriam" from the worst excesses of modern depreciation'.<sup>484</sup> It is hard to believe that Gilbert Thomas (the critic who came to this conclusion) had even read Fausset's book, where the author is, as Laurence W. Mazzeno has noted, 'sometimes vicious and almost always derogatory'.<sup>485</sup> Nicolson is not as ostentatiously hostile to Tennyson's work and character as Hugh I'Anson Fausset; however his book is a critical reappraisal of the poet's worth in the style of Lytton Strachey. In his introduction we read that

for over fifty years his votaries prostrated themselves before the shrine which they had built for him, and he, moving a little clumsily at times within his sacerdotal vestments, became inevitably less and less the lyric poet, and more and more the civic prophet – the communal bard.<sup>486</sup>

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<sup>483</sup> C. Collier Abbott, 'A Short View of the Case Against Tennyson', *Humberside* 2.1 (October 1923), p. 8.

<sup>484</sup> Gilbert Thomas, 'Tennyson and the Georgians', *London Quarterly Review* 140 (July 1923), p. 46.

<sup>485</sup> Mazzeno, p. 70.

<sup>486</sup> Harold Nicolson, *Tennyson: Aspects of his Life, Character and Poetry* (London: Constable & Company 1923) p. 5. Hereafter Nicolson.



Nicolson views it as his duty to differentiate between 'Tennyson the poet' and 'Tennyson the bard' in order to 'let in the sun' on the poet's laurels, which have grown into 'vast thickets, dusty, cumbersome, and unvisited'.<sup>487</sup> To do so, he writes a short biography of the poet, in which he is very critical of the influence of Emily, the poet's wife. By virtue of their 1850 marriage,

the wistful lady who became his wife was able, with little worsted strands, to bind what was most wild in him and most original, and by the persistent creation around him of an atmosphere of reverent admiration to build up, even for the Laureate himself, the legend of an infallible and prophetic thinker, the legend of a great ethical force – the legend, in fact, of all that Tennyson most emphatically was not, of all that he should never have attempted to be.<sup>488</sup>

In 1892 Emily Tennyson was described in a poem by Theodore Martin (himself quoting from Tennyson's 'Isobel') as 'The queen of marriage, a most perfect wife'.<sup>489</sup> The difference between this, and the extremely critical tone of Nicolson's account of the marriage, could not be greater, demonstrating the change in English biographical practice and views of the poet between 1892 and 1923. Nicolson permits himself to state as fact outright untruths (as Ann Thwaite has recently shown, Emily Tennyson was 'passionate', and far from conventional),<sup>490</sup> as well as inherently criticise another age for its failings, which are judged in

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<sup>487</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

<sup>488</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>489</sup> Theodore Martin, 'Tennyson and "Cymbeline"' line 13, *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* Vol. CLII, No. DCCCCXXV (November 1892), p. 767.

<sup>490</sup> Ann Thwaite, *Emily Tennyson: The Poet's Wife* (London: Faber & Faber 1996) p. xvii.

comparison to Nicolson's rather less conventional 1920s world.<sup>491</sup> The entirely fictional account of Tennyson at his home in Farringford in Nicolson's book is memorable, with Tennyson's day beginning badly 'because the housemaid had removed a can of hot water which he had put out for his own shaving after breakfast', his irritation enduring throughout the day so that he frequently returns, 'nagging about that can', disturbing his wife's 'day's work'.<sup>492</sup> The account of the poet's readings is no more forgiving, as Nicolson renders his lengthened vowels in a reading of 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington' as 'Bury the greaaat Duke with an empire's lamentaaation', and 'To the nooise of the moourning of a mighty naaation'.<sup>493</sup> These readings are dwelt on at length, with the obvious intention of presenting the poet as self-obsessed and boring – 'All that was expected of the audience during the recitation was their rapt attention, and if, at the end, any comment was exacted, it was easy to evade the point by becoming "broken down"'.<sup>494</sup> Nicolson is also selective in citing eyewitness accounts. He backs up his description of Tennyson's readings with Henry James's description of the audience being under 'the heaviest pressure', without including James's conclusion that the result of such an atmosphere was that for him, Tennyson was 'more a bard than ever'.<sup>495</sup>

This seems at odds with Nicolson's differentiation between 'poet' and 'bard', and the latter takes on a firmly negative association in his book. According to Nicolson, Tennyson's frequent lapses into the mundane bardic incarnation are

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<sup>491</sup> Nicolson was married to Vita Sackville-West who nonetheless conducted various same-sex affairs throughout her life.

<sup>492</sup> Nicolson, p. 158.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid., p. 172.

<sup>494</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>495</sup> Henry James, *The Middle Years*, in *Autobiography* ed. Frederick W. Dupee (New York: Criterion Books, 1956), p. 593.

a result of 'circumstances', which turn out to be the fact that he is 'great', but not 'supremely great', and thus unable to overcome 'the taste of his contemporaries'.<sup>496</sup> This leaves his poetry with an 'unnatural objectivity', which 'subordinated the lyric to the instructional'.<sup>497</sup> Nicolson believes this to be especially concentrated in Tennyson's 'mid-Victorian' period, which consists of 'the group of poems which cluster round the *Idylls* and *Enoch Arden*'.<sup>498</sup> Indeed, the *Idylls* are scarcely mentioned, and when Nicolson does consider them, pausing for a few sentences on the 'magnificent poetry' contained therein, he labels them 'intellectually insincere'.<sup>499</sup>

The Tennyson worth reading, Nicolson concludes, can be found in the earlier poems: 'one could emerge triumphantly in 1837 having proved that all the most durable of Tennyson's work was either published or composed before the accession of Queen Victoria'.<sup>500</sup> Ultimately for Nicolson, concluding his first chapter,

He will be appreciated because he wrote *Ulysses* and *The Lotos-Eaters*; because he wrote *Tithonus*; because he wrote *The Two Voices*; because he wrote *Maud*; because he wrote:-

'Now lies the Earth all Danæe to the stars,'

*And Crossing the Bar.*

And, after all, *In Memoriam*.<sup>501</sup>

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<sup>496</sup> Nicolson, p. 10; *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>498</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 231.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>500</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

This focus on *In Memoriam*, perhaps undermining Nicolson's earlier statement about Tennyson's pre-1837 work, can be seen as a continuation of the earlier champion of Tennyson, A. C. Bradley. And yet if we choose to take Nicolson's word as gospel, Tennyson is only worth reading as far as 1855, with just a few poems published after that date requiring the reader's attention.

Reviewers were quick to highlight the fact that Nicolson and Fausset were preoccupied by a 'dislike of the Victorian age', and this 'dislike' is evident in other works of criticism published in the 1920s.<sup>502</sup> Robert Graves and Laura Riding, in their 1927 *Survey of Modernist Poetry*, used Tennyson as an example of what was wrong with Victorian poetry – its perfection of sound was dangerous as it led to 'the effect of allowing the thought of the poem to be controlled by its ability to please musically'.<sup>503</sup> Graves and Riding went further in their criticism than Nicolson, and singled out *In Memoriam* for comparison with *The Waste Land*. Eliot would later write an appreciative essay about Tennyson's poem, though Riding and Graves's criticism privileged the Modernist work far above the Victorian. For them *The Waste Land* consisted of 'delicate transitions from one atmosphere to another, where the separate parts are joined into a single continuous poem'.<sup>504</sup> This elevated it above *In Memoriam*, as Graves and Riding found 'no such transitions' therein; 'length in such poems means bulk'.<sup>505</sup>

More traditional critics, however, still found much to praise in Tennyson. Laurence Binyon, reviewing Nicolson and l'Anson Fausset's books on Tennyson in *The Bookman* in 1923, wrote that despite the 'period of eclipse' in Tennyson

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<sup>502</sup> 'For and Against Tennyson', *Times Literary Supplement* 1,108 (12<sup>th</sup> April 1923), p. 237.

<sup>503</sup> Laura Riding and Robert Graves. *A Survey of Modernist Poetry* (London: William Heinemann, 1927), p. 31.

<sup>504</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>505</sup> *Ibid.*

criticism between 1892 and 1923, 'no doubt Tennyson has always kept his large public'.<sup>506</sup> And Tennyson was not considered responsible for the Great War by everyone – some critics were quick to highlight any instances of his work anticipating the events of the conflict. On the simplest level, the idea of aerial warfare hinted at in 'Locksley Hall' (1842), '[I] Heard the heavens fill with shouting, and there rained a ghastly dew / From the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue' was included in a 1925 anthology, *The Poetry of Flight*. 'Locksley Hall' was also cited (if misquoted) as prophecy in James Main Dixon's *The Spiritual Meaning of 'In Memoriam'* (1920), where we read 'to-day, when the score of nations whom Germany has filled with righteous wrath meet in council to lay down the terms of a just peace, this council may well be termed the first "Parliament and Federation of the World."'<sup>507</sup>

This assumed relevance to the post-war world was mirrored by a widespread belief that the public, or at least a certain section of the general public, were still familiar with, and indeed interested in, Tennyson's poems in the 1920s. This is clear both from popular literature and from the newly emerging medium of radio. In the *Times* radio listings in the 1920s, there are thirty-nine separate instances of Tennyson poems either recited, or set to music. His work was even given its own half-hour programme, second from last in the series *The Foundations of English Poetry*, which ran on Sunday afternoons from April to July in 1928 on the BBC; in the final programme of the series, broadcast the following week, the same amount of time is given over to examining the disparate talents

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<sup>506</sup> 'Tennyson' by Laurence Binyon, *The Bookman* 64 (April 1923), p. 23.

<sup>507</sup> James Main Dixon, *The Spiritual Meaning of 'In Memoriam'* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1920), p. 14.

of 'Browning, Swinburne and Matthew Arnold', a clear indication of Tennyson's continued dominance of 'Victorian poetry'.<sup>508</sup> Even if such programmes could be said to appeal to a minority audience of poetry enthusiasts, there are also myriad references to Tennyson in the popular fiction of the day; for example, in the novels and short stories of P.G. Wodehouse.

Wodehouse frequently alludes to literature in his work, not least Shakespeare (the line 'Exit, pursued by a bear' is a favourite) and Burns.<sup>509</sup> His literary references are more often than not deployed for comic effect, and yet the very fact of their inclusion in the novels shows that Wodehouse thought that his readership would be able to identify the quotations and thus participate in the joke. His novels, and in particular those published in the 1920s, demonstrate that his intended readership (he was popular with young and old alike) was acquainted with the works of Tennyson, and not least with *Idylls of the King*. These are intrinsic to the plot of *The Girl on the Boat*, which was published in 1922. In the novel, two young men, Eustace Hignett and Sam Marlowe, vie for the affections of Wilhelmina, who is obsessed with the work of Tennyson, especially the *Idylls*. Hignett is bookish and cowardly; he refuses to intervene in a fight between two dogs despite Wilhelmina's protests that 'Sir Galahad would

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<sup>508</sup> 'Sunday Programmes', *The Times* 44933 (June 30<sup>th</sup> 1928), p. 10; 'Sunday Programmes', *ibid.* issue 44939 (July 7<sup>th</sup> 1928) p. 19. Also see the companion anthology, *The Foundations of Poetry* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1928); this includes five pages of Tennyson including 'Blow, bugle, blow', 'Now sleeps the crimson petal', 'Ulysses' and four stanzas from *In Memoriam* (VI, XI, XXVII and LIV).

<sup>509</sup> *The Winter's Tale*, III.iii.57 in *The Arden Shakespeare: Complete Works*, ed. Richard Proudfoot, Ann Thompson and David Scott Kastan (Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1998) p. 1292; see 'The Indian Summer of an Uncle', one of the stories in *Very Good, Jeeves* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1930), p. 282.

have done it like a shot',<sup>510</sup> whereas Marlowe is rather more worldly (if there is a 'Galahad' figure in the book, it is he), but relies on Hignett to introduce him to the *Idylls*, knowledge of which is decisive in the quest for Wilhelmina's heart. He eventually succeeds in winning her over, but only thanks to a succession of mishaps, not the least of which involves his hiding in a suit of armour. When first introduced to Tennyson's poetry, he finds it very useful for courtship, as 'You could open his collected works almost anywhere and shut your eyes and dab down your finger on some red-hot passage'.<sup>511</sup>

From other novels it is clear that Wodehouse did not intend to *ridicule* Tennyson – young female characters are frequently attributed with a rather overbearing passion for poetry in Wodehouse's novels, and those who admire Tennyson are portrayed with a good deal more affection than the T. S. Eliot enthusiasts who appear in some of his later stories.<sup>512</sup> Even as Sam Marlowe (a golf enthusiast) tries to escape a conversation about Tennyson as quickly as possible in *The Girl on the Boat*, he voices an opinion of the poet's work that would have been fairly orthodox in conservative literary criticism of the 1890s:

Some poets are whales at epics and all that sort of thing, while others call it a day when they've written something that runs to a couple of verses, but where Tennyson had the bulge was that his long game was just as good as his short. He was great off the tee

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<sup>510</sup> P.G. Wodehouse, *The Girl on the Boat* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1922) p. 64. Hereafter *The Girl on the Boat*. This idea of Tennyson's adaptability for courtship recurs in the 1940s, in Evelyn Waugh's *The Loved One*.

<sup>511</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 77.

<sup>512</sup> See, for example, Florence in *Jeeves and the Feudal Spirit* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1954), p. 125, who berates Bertie Wooster for playing darts 'When you might be reading T. S. Eliot'.

and a marvel with his chip-shots. [...] When I am not reading

Tennyson, you can generally find me out on the links.<sup>513</sup>

One can assume that the tee-shots are epics, and the chips shorter, lyrical works. This opinion is scarcely different from, although a lot more entertaining than, the view espoused by Arthur D. Innes in his 1893 *Seers and Singers* that 'There is no English poet, unless it be Milton or Spenser, who displays so consistent, so unvarying a control of his verse as the Laureate; and neither of them approaches him in the astonishing variety of the forms of versification he employs'.<sup>514</sup> It is striking that, even if Wodehouse's novel is set in an idealised Edwardian past, this view is being propagated in *The Girl on the Boat*, published twenty-nine years after Innes's book.

If the poems of Tennyson remained widely-known, by 1930 it was clear that the influence of the emerging generation of writers which came to prominence in the 1920s had affected his popularity. It is for this reason that, writing in 1930,<sup>515</sup> Ford Madox Ford summed up the artistic struggles between generations thus:

We are as much influenced by reactions against thoughts and tendencies as by their formulation; the fulcrum is as necessary as

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<sup>513</sup> *The Girl on the Boat*, p. 67.

<sup>514</sup> Arthur D. Innes, *Seers and Singers: A Study of Five English Poets* (London: A.D. Innes & Co. 1893) p. 35.

<sup>515</sup> Janice Biala has stated that Ford's history, of which this forms a part, was finished by May 1930. See Ford Madox Ford, *A History of Our Own Times* ed. Solon Beinfeld and Sondra J. Stang (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. xvi.



the lever. I would not denounce so freely what, say, Tennyson stood for had Tennyson never been prominent in his day.<sup>516</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Ibid., pp. 28-9.

## Chapter Six

### The 1930s

In the early 1830s, one could be forgiven for thinking that the dominant importance of Tennyson to contemporary literature was the potential for parody provided by his poetry and character. In 1930, Tennyson's work featured prominently in *The Stuffed Owl*, Charles Lee and D. B. Wyndham Lewis's 'Anthology of Bad Verse', and John Collier wrote in 1932 that Tennyson reflected the 'fancies and sentiments' of his age, deliberately using lightweight terms to distance the poet from the age of the Great Depression in the USA and 2.5 million unemployed in the UK.<sup>517</sup>

Virginia Woolf had already directly engaged with Tennyson in her novels of the late 1910s and 1920s, and in 1935 finally finished her play *Freshwater*,<sup>518</sup> about the poet and his coterie in the Isle of Wight, in order for it to be performed at the 17<sup>th</sup> birthday party of her niece, Angelica Garnett. The action takes place on one day in 1864, in which the recently married seventeen year old actress Ellen Terry and her husband (almost thirty years older than her), the painter G. F. Watts, visit the Camerons at Dimbola Lodge on the Isle of Wight. At the start of the play, Julia Margaret Cameron is washing her husband's beard in preparation for their proposed move to India (in reality they left England for Ceylon in 1875). Tennyson, who lived very close by at Farringford, clatters into the scene

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<sup>517</sup> Charles Lee and D. B. Wyndham Lewis (eds.), *The Stuffed Owl: An Anthology* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1930); John Collier, 'Lord Tennyson', in *The Great Victorians* ed. H. J. and Hugh Massingham (London: Ivor Nicholson & Watson, 1932), p. 508.

<sup>518</sup> Woolf proposed the idea in 1919 and a draft from 1923 exists. See Lucio P. Ruotolo's 'Preface', *Freshwater* pp. x-xi.

complaining of intrusion from tourists at his house - 'the Ladies Poetry Circle from Ohio' currently occupy his bathroom.<sup>519</sup>

On hearing that the Camerons are to move, Tennyson is instantly worried, asking 'how am I going to read *Maud* to you while you're in India? Still – what's the time? Twelve fifteen? I've read it in less.'<sup>520</sup> The reading goes on, in and out of the audience's earshot, for most of the first scene of the play. His ridiculous self-absorption can be seen even more clearly in the 1923 draft of the play, where he complains that if the Camerons leave, 'whatever else may happen, they can never by any possible chance hear me read *Maud* again'.<sup>521</sup> Such extended recitals were commonplace at Farringford, as is clear from accounts in late Victorian and early twentieth century life writing such as Henry James's *Middle Years*. Woolf also mocks Tennyson's hostility to his critics in the 1935 text:

There was a damned ass praising Browning the other day.

Browning, I tell you. But I ask you, could Browning have written:

The moan of doves in immemorial elms,

The murmuring of innumerable bees.

Or this, perhaps the loveliest line in the language – The mellow  
ouzel fluting on the lawn? [*The donkey brays.*] Donkeys at Dimbola!

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>520</sup> Ibid., p. 9.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid., p.58.

Geese at Farringford! The son of man has nowhere to lay his  
head!<sup>522</sup>

The poet's lack of modesty is underlined by his telling Ellen Terry, sitting on his lap, that 'I am sensible to beauty in all its forms. That is my function as Poet Laureate'.<sup>523</sup> Later on in the play, after meeting John Craig, a young sailor, the 17 year old actress gives a summary of the Victorian intellectuals who congregated on the south coast of the island, at the town of the play's title:

Mrs. Cameron is the photographer; and Mr. Cameron is the  
philosopher; and Mr. Tennyson is the poet; and Signor is the artist.  
And beauty is truth; truth beauty; that is all we know and all we  
ought to ask.<sup>524</sup>

#### Auden and Pound: Political Parodies

W. H. Auden's 1936 poem 'August for the People' also concerns Freshwater. The poet remembers his youthful holiday on the Isle of Wight with his friend, Christopher Isherwood:

Nine years ago, upon that southern island  
Where the wild Tennyson became a fossil,

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<sup>522</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>523</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid., pp. 24-25.

Half-boys, we spoke of books and praised  
The acid and austere, behind us only  
The stuccoed suburb and expensive school.<sup>525</sup>

Tennyson, at least by the time he arrived at Farringford on the Isle of Wight in 1853, is considered a 'fossil' by the more modern poet. The image is interesting – Auden's longstanding interest in evolution would mean that he knew Tennyson as the Victorian poet who had most fully engaged with evolutionary theory, and to call him a 'fossil' is to both accept his importance in this respect (*In Memoriam* was written and published before Tennyson arrived in the Isle of Wight), as well as label his later poetry as the work of a 'fossil' – of historical interest, and worthy of study, but essentially lifeless. And an earlier poetic engagement with Tennyson sees Auden appropriating the Victorian's work for his own political ends.

In the spring of 1930, the 23-year-old Auden, recently graduated from Oxford, submitted a manuscript of poems to Faber & Faber.<sup>526</sup> He had already tried his luck with the publishing house in its earlier incarnation of Faber & Gwyer in 1927 in his second year as an undergraduate; T. S. Eliot, who was reading manuscripts for the firm at the time, sent him back a rejection note with the vaguely encouraging qualification that 'I should be interested to follow your work'.<sup>527</sup> The 1930 volume contained none of the poems which Eliot had rejected in 1927; it was accepted in May and published in September of the same year.

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<sup>525</sup> W. H. Auden, 'August for the People' lines 25-29, in *The English Auden* ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1986), p. 156.

<sup>526</sup> Edward Mendelson, *Early Auden* (London: Faber & Faber, 1981), p. 32.

<sup>527</sup> *Ibid.*

By this stage Eliot was established as one of the foremost poets of the day, and his work was enormously influential in the English literary world at the time. Brian Howard noted in the *New Statesman* in 1930 that the new generation of English poets was so heavily influenced by *The Waste Land* that when trying to edit an anthology of their work, the presence of Eliot's poem 'became such a plague that the moment the eye encountered, in a newly arrived poem, the words "stone", "dust" or "dry" one reached for the waste-paper basket.'<sup>528</sup> The above extract from 'August for the People' includes the word 'austere', which Auden thought an essential quality of poetry when he was an undergraduate at Oxford, probably as a result of Eliot's influence.<sup>529</sup>

Auden was even more audacious than the Eliot of *The Waste Land* in his allusion to Tennyson in *Poems* (1930). In the years between his initial submission to Eliot and the publication of this first volume, Auden had abandoned the ideal of a poet with 'no interest in politics' which he had expounded as an undergraduate.<sup>530</sup> Many of the 1930 poems have explicitly public concerns, not least 'Get there if you can' – which Auden referred to as 'the Locksley Hall poem' in a letter to Christopher Isherwood.<sup>531</sup> It begins:

Get there if you can and see the land you once were proud to own  
Though the roads have almost vanished and the expresses never  
run:

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<sup>528</sup> Brian Howard, 'Mr. Eliot's Poetry', *The New Statesman* 36.915 (8<sup>th</sup> November 1930), p. 146.

<sup>529</sup> In 'Letter to Lord Byron' Auden remembers that 'Through the quads dogmatic words rang clear, / "Good poetry is classic and austere"'. 'Letter to Lord Byron' IV lines 293-294, *The English Auden* p. 195.

<sup>530</sup> *Early Auden*, p. 84.

<sup>531</sup> John Fuller, *W. H. Auden: A Commentary* (London: Faber & Faber, 1998), p. 69.

Smokeless chimneys, damaged bridges, rotting wharves and  
choked canals,  
Tramlines buckled, smashed trucks lying on their side across the  
rails [...].<sup>532</sup>

This follows exactly the same metre and two-line stanza form as Tennyson's 'Locksley Hall', which was first published in the 1842 volume. While this appears at first an intensely personal poem – it has long been claimed that it was inspired by Tennyson's ultimate rejection by Rosa Baring, coupled with his grandfather's decision to disinherit Tennyson's father – it is also a state of the nation poem.<sup>533</sup> In 1896 George W. Alger cited it as evidence of Tennyson's status as 'poet of the English people', and J. W. Mackail in 1926 recalled that the poem was 'for a time to many ardent souls something like a new gospel.'<sup>534</sup> 'Locksley Hall' may start with the courtship of 'shallow-hearted' Amy, but following his rejection, the narrator goes on to envisage the future, where a war between 'the nations' airy navies grappling in the central blue' results in the establishment of 'The Parliament of Man, the Federation of the World', which is anticipated despite the current situation where 'all things here are out of joint'.<sup>535</sup>

Auden's poem is also a state of the nation address in which things are 'out of joint'. In 'Get there if you can', writers like 'Newman, Ciddy, Plato, Fronny, Pascal, Bowdler [and] Baudelaire', 'have betrayed us nicely while we took them

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<sup>532</sup> 'Get there if you can', lines 1-4, *The English Auden*, p. 48.

<sup>533</sup> See *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 688.

<sup>534</sup> George W. Alger, 'Tennyson as Poet of the English People', *Poet-Lore* VIII (1896), p. 327; J. W. Mackail, *Studies of English Poets* (London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1926), p. 241.

<sup>535</sup> 'Locksley Hall' lines 39, 124, 128 and 133, *The Poems of Tennyson*, pp. 691-6.

to our rooms,' while the 'healers' that could have offered some sort of a cure have been lost:<sup>536</sup>

Lawrence was brought down by smut-hounds, Blake went dotty as  
he sang,  
Homer Lane was killed in action by the Twickenham Baptist  
gang.<sup>537</sup>

The danger for the narrator is if things carry on in the way they have been, 'the mob' will realise 'something's up, and start to smash' – which leads him to conclude:<sup>538</sup>

Drop those priggish ways for ever, stop behaving like a stone:  
Throw the bath-chairs right away, and learn to leave ourselves  
alone.

If we really want to live, we'd better start at once to try;  
If we don't it doesn't matter, but we'd better start to die.<sup>539</sup>

Edward Mendelson claims that this 'breathtakingly implausible' conclusion implies that readers must 'cure ourselves' in order for 'something outside politics

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<sup>536</sup> 'Get there if you can' lines 18-19, *The English Auden*, p. 48.

<sup>537</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 37-8, p. 49.

<sup>538</sup> *Ibid.*, line 45.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 51-4.



[...] to cure the world's disorder'.<sup>540</sup> But he believes that such a resolution is near impossible, as if Auden 'had no cure for himself, what could he offer others?'<sup>541</sup>

And yet as Mendelson notes elsewhere, in 'Get there if you can', 'the audience is not really being addressed at all'.<sup>542</sup> What Auden is actually addressing is the English poetic tradition, in which his poem – like *The Waste Land* – is an important intervention.<sup>543</sup> 'Locksley Hall' was, by 1930, clearly outdated both in terms of its form and the ideas expressed in the poem. Tennyson had written a 'sequel' to his poem, 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', in 1886, in which the narrator, now eighty, reiterates his belief in progress even though 'the course of Time will swerve, / Crook and turn upon itself in many a backward streaming curve.'<sup>544</sup> Auden's poem, which is a lot more pessimistic about progress, can easily be seen as a 'Locksley Hall Eighty-Eight Years After', voiced by the grandson of Tennyson's narrator, and yet is far from a respectful continuation of Tennyson's work: his adoption of Tennyson's metre and stanzaic form, in a poem of frenzy and hyperbole, is as parodic as Eliot's 'O swallow swallow'. While many of the 1930 *Poems* have a clear rhyme scheme and metre, 'Get there if you can' is far and away the least subtle, its closed two-line couplets affording the verse momentum at the expense of sense. The vision of the future is as unlikely as the 'Federation of the World' Tennyson envisaged:

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<sup>540</sup> *Early Auden*, pp. 90-1.

<sup>541</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 91.

<sup>542</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13.

<sup>543</sup> Throughout his career, Auden believed steadfastly in an idea (close to that of Eliot) of the poet's relation to the 'English Tradition', telling his brother John in 1927, 'The only thing which can hold you up in expression is just a lack of the tradition'. Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), p. 64. In 1940 he repeated the idea in 'New Year Letter', writing of the 'Great masters who have shown mankind / An order it has yet to find' ['New Year Letter' lines 99-100, *Collected Poems* ed. Edward Mendelson (London: Faber & Faber, 1991), p. 201.]

<sup>544</sup> 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After', lines 235-6, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1368.

Engine-drivers with their oil-cans, factory girls in overalls  
Blowing sky-high monster stores, destroying intellectuals?<sup>545</sup>

The rhyme here is deliberately provocative, the 'overalls' and 'intellectuals' drawn together in a vision that cannot be taken entirely seriously. Indeed, the young Gavin Ewart adopted the same rhyme scheme three years later in his poem 'Audenesque for an Initiation', which claims that the younger poetic generation has 'given up the Georgian poets, teaching dance bands how to croon, / Bicycling in coloured goggles underneath a pallid moon.'<sup>546</sup> While Ewart is being characteristically mischievous here, it is nonetheless true that 'Get there if you can' is one of the most powerful, and indeed memorable, of the 1930 *Poems*.

In another state of the nation poem which comes immediately before 'Get there if you can' in the collection, 'Consider this and in our time', Auden claims that 'the game is up' for the 'financier, leaving your little room.'<sup>547</sup> The main poet who was attacking financiers in verse in the early 1930s was Ezra Pound, whose political views differed markedly from those of Auden (Pound 'was already disposed to put some faith in' Mussolini as early as 1927 and met him in 1933; Auden referred to the dictator as 'the ninny' in 'Ode IV' in 1931).<sup>548</sup> Pound was unwavering in his view of Tennyson, and in 1933 he again denied the poet as an influence, as 'Homer, Villon, Propertius, speak of the world as I know it, whereas Mr. Tennyson and Dr. Bridges did not', adding in 1934 that 'it is stupid to overlook the lingual inventions of precurrent authors, even when they were fools

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<sup>545</sup> 'Get there if you can', lines 47-48, *The English Auden*, p. 49.

<sup>546</sup> Gavin Ewart, 'Audenesque for an Initiation' lines 15-16, *New Verse* 6 (December 1933), p. 12.

<sup>547</sup> 'Consider this and in our time' lines 42-45, *The English Auden*, p. 47.

<sup>548</sup> J. J. Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound: The Tragic Years 1925-1972* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), p. 26; *ibid.*, p. 69; 'Odes' IV, line 78, *The English Auden*, p. 102.

or flapdoodles or Tennysons.<sup>549</sup> 'Tennyson' becomes a term of abuse, which makes a series of poems Pound published in *The New English Weekly* in 1934 all the stranger. These were apparently by 'Alfred Venison', a self-educated poet who learned new pieces of vocabulary at 'night school' (possibly extension lectures of the kind taught by T. S. Eliot on Victorian poetry in London in the 1910s) and submitted his poetry to the *New English Weekly* with letters (actually written by the editor of the periodical, Alfred R. Orage) about how proud his 'missus' was to see his work in print.<sup>550</sup> His first effort was 'The Charge of the Hunger Brigade', resolutely opposed to the hunger marches in 1934, which uses the same metre as Tennyson's 'Charge of the Light Brigade':

Half a loaf, half a loaf,  
Half a loaf? Um-hum?  
Down through the vale of gloom  
Slouched the ten million [...]<sup>551</sup>

A later poem, taking Tennyson's 'The Poet's Mind' as its inspiration, runs:

Vex thou not the banker's mind  
(His *what?*) with a show of sense,  
[...]

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<sup>549</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Prefatio Aut Cimicium Tumulus', *Selected Prose 1909-1965* ed. William Cookson (London: Faber & Faber, 1973), p. 360; Ezra Pound, *Make it New* (London: Faber & Faber, 1934), p. 399.

<sup>550</sup> Ezra Pound (as 'Alfred Venison'), 'Alf's Second Bit', *The New English Weekly* 4.18 (15<sup>th</sup> February 1934), p. 432.

<sup>551</sup> Ezra Pound (as 'Alfred Venison'), 'The Charge of the Bread Brigade', *ibid.*, 4.16 (February 1, 1934), p. 364.

In his eyes there is death, – I mean the banker's, –

In his purse there is deceit.

It is he who buys gold-braid for the swankers

And gives you Australian iced rabbits' meat

In place of the roast beef of Britain,

And leaves you a park bench to sit on

If you git off the Embankment.<sup>552</sup>

The poems were included in some editions of Pound's *Personæ* (his best-selling collection of shorter poems) but were dropped from the volume by his editors A. Walton Litz and Lea Baechler in 1990.<sup>553</sup> Pound's biographer J. J. Wilhelm believes this is because 'The doggerel quality of the verse is too apparent, the dialect is often unconvincing, and the issues are hardly handled in a way that invites deeper study.'<sup>554</sup> While the poetic merits of the 'Venison' poems are questionable, it is worth looking at what Pound was trying to achieve with them.

They are close, in many ways, to his journalistic, demotic prose style, yet are metrically tight and designed to have an impact as *poems*. By the time Pound came to write them, he was a dedicated follower of C. H. Douglas's idea of Social Credit, which the poet saw as a solution to the problems caused by the Great Depression in both the USA and Europe. Douglas's theory was that the majority of debt is caused by banks profiting from the loans they have made to citizens, and that it is the function of the state to lend, not borrow; by lending to the state,

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<sup>552</sup> Ezra Pound (as 'Alfred Venison'), 'Alf's Seventh Bit', *ibid.*, 4.24 (29<sup>th</sup> March 1934), p. 574.

<sup>553</sup> See Ezra Pound, *Personæ* ed. Lea Baechler and A. Walton Litz (London: Faber & Faber, 2001), and *Personæ* (London: Faber & Faber, 1952).

<sup>554</sup> J. J. Wilhelm, *Ezra Pound: The Tragic Years 1925-1972*, p. 104.

the capitalist bank 'usurps the function of the State.'<sup>555</sup> Social Credit would solve this problem by the government stepping in to control the nation's credit, determining a 'just' price for goods, with every citizen a shareholder in the national bank, guaranteed an income regardless of employment.<sup>556</sup> In Pound's pamphlet *Social Credit: An Impact* he railed against the actions of 'banks created to prey on the people', and denigrated the government as 'a constitutional accumulation of indefinite hand-me-downs.'<sup>557</sup> Pound is quoted on the cover of a pamphlet of the collected poems of 'Venison' as saying 'Only Social Credit could have produced this poet',<sup>558</sup> and the poems return over and over to the theme of corrupt banks and politicians starving the nation:

There is no land like England  
Where banks rise day by day,  
There are no banks like English banks  
To make the people pay.<sup>559</sup>

They also deal with self-serving politicians, such as this poem which follows the *In Memoriam* stanza and is an adaptation of part XLV of the poem:

'The baby new to earth and sky,'  
As Tennyson has written,

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<sup>555</sup> C. H. Douglas, *Economic Democracy* (London: Cecil Palmer, 1920), p. 124.

<sup>556</sup> See Leon Surette, *Pound in Purgatory* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), p. 201.

<sup>557</sup> Ezra Pound, *Social Credit: An Impact* (London: Stanley Nott, 1935), p. 10; *ibid.*, p. 28.

<sup>558</sup> Ezra Pound, *Pamphlets on the New Economics 9: Alfred Venison's Poetry* (London: Stanley Nott, 1935).

<sup>559</sup> Ezra Pound (as 'Alfred Venison'), 'National Song (E. C.)', *The New English Weekly* 5.22 (13<sup>th</sup> September 1934), p. 421.

Just goes ahead and sucks a teat

Like to-day's great men in Britain.<sup>560</sup>

It is hard to discern the reason behind Pound's decision to make his cockney poet use Tennysonian verse form in most of his poems. Compared with the *Cantos*, on which he was working at the same time and which touch on the issue of social credit, the 'Venison' verse seems lightweight rather than biting satire. Tennyson's verse may well have been chosen as the 'inspiration' for the poems because of the readership's continued familiarity with his work – *The New English Weekly* was unquestionably written for the well-educated, its pages featuring poems by A. E. and Dylan Thomas as well as essays on economics and T. S. Eliot. As such, one could conclude that Tennyson was still an integral part of an education in poetry in the 1920s and 1930s, despite his fall from grace in criticism published in the period.

Pound's parodic citation of Tennyson may not be a direct engagement with Auden, but it is nonetheless interesting that poets of the 1930s at loggerheads in terms of politics are united in the choice of vehicle for their political parodies. T. S. Eliot also returned to Tennyson in a semi-parodic fashion in the early 1930s. He published 'Five Finger Exercises', a series of short poems, in *The Egoist* in 1933. Among these 'exercises', we find what looks like a coded account of the development of Eliot's taste in poetry. 'Lines to a Duck in the Park' begins 'The long light shakes across the lake', almost a direct quotation from Tennyson's lyric 'The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls' from *The Princess*, the

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<sup>560</sup> Ezra Pound (as 'Alfred Venison'), 'The Baby', *ibid*, 5.16 (2<sup>nd</sup> August 1934), p. 380.

third line of which runs, 'The long light shakes across the lakes'.<sup>561</sup> The fourth line of Eliot's poem – 'Here is no eft or mortal snake' – is also derived from Tennyson, this time from 'The Holy Grail', where Sir Percivale says that he has been 'A bedmate of the snail and eft and snake / In grass and burdock'.<sup>562</sup> But there are no further references to the Victorian, and Eliot's poem ends:

For I know, and so should you  
That soon the enquiring worm shall try  
Our well-preserved complacency.<sup>563</sup>

This clear allusion to Marvell's 'To His Coy Mistress', a different part of which is also referred to in *The Waste Land*,<sup>564</sup> would suggest that this poem reflects the progression of Eliot's poetical taste, from Tennyson – as is clear from his undergraduate poems – to Marvell and the metaphysical poets.

### Revaluations: Yeats, Leavis and Tennyson

In 1932, F. R. Leavis, an emerging critic who taught at Downing College, Cambridge, championed T. S. Eliot as the most important of the new generation of poets. In Leavis's eyes, Tennyson was near-irrelevant; in *New Bearings in English Poetry* (1932) he remarked that the poet's 'intellectual interests [...] have

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<sup>561</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Lines to a Duck in the Park' line 1, *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 135; 'The splendour falls on castle walls' line 3, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 783.

<sup>562</sup> 'Lines to a Duck in the Park' line 4, *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 136; 'The Holy Grail' 569-570, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1677.

<sup>563</sup> 'Lines to a Duck in the Park' lines 12-14, *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 136.

<sup>564</sup> 'But at my back from time to time I hear', *The Waste Land* line 196, *ibid.*, p. 67. Eliot notes the source of this line in his notes, *ibid.*, p. 77.

little to do with his successful poetry', and went on to claim that Gerard Manley Hopkins 'is likely to prove, for our time and the future, the only influential poet of the Victorian age, and he seems to me the greatest.'<sup>565</sup> Leavis's agenda in writing his book was to establish a new tradition, at odds with the 'dead' work of Robert Bridges and the later Victorians, with Eliot and Hopkins at its centre.<sup>566</sup> In this Leavis was united with another poet he had championed in *New Bearings*, W. B. Yeats, in the opinion that whatever new poetry should be like, it should be unlike Tennyson.

In the introduction to his 1936 *Oxford Book of Modern Verse*, Yeats noted the general trend toward anti-Victorianism in verse written between 1892 and 1935:

The revolt against Victorianism meant to the young poet a revolt against irrelevant descriptions of nature, the scientific and moral discursiveness of *In Memoriam* – 'When he should have been broken-hearted,' said Verlaine, 'he had many reminiscences' – the political eloquence of Swinburne, the psychological curiosity of Browning, and the poetical diction of everybody.<sup>567</sup>

Yeats's book is deeply unconventional from the beginning – the first poem is a verse rendition of a sentence from an essay by Walter Pater – and claims to include 'all good poets who have lived or died from three years before the death

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<sup>565</sup> F. R. Leavis, *New Bearings in English Poetry* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1932), p. 15; *ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

<sup>567</sup> W. B. Yeats, introduction to *The Oxford Book of Modern Verse 1892-1935* (Oxford: OUP, 1936), p. ix.



of Tennyson to the present moment, except some two or three who belong through the character of their work to an earlier period.'<sup>568</sup> This did not stop Yeats from including Gerard Manley Hopkins in the collection, but it does mean that in his introduction he dwelt on the negative aspects of Victorian poetry – not least *Idylls of the King*.

There are only two long poems in Victorian literature that caught public attention; *The Ring and The Book* where great intellect analyses the suffering of one passive soul, weighs the persecutor's guilt, and *The Idylls of the King* where a poetry in itself an exquisite passivity is built about an allegory where a characterless king represents the soul.<sup>569</sup>

Yeats is being deliberately forgetful here – 'Enoch Arden' and *In Memoriam* also 'caught public attention', and the latter is significant in terms of this passage and Yeats's repetition of the word 'soul'. In both poems Yeats identifies, the Victorian 'soul' is seen as inadequate – either 'passive' or represented by a 'characterless king'. Tennyson had considered the title 'The Way of the Soul' before deciding on *In Memoriam*, and Yeats could have had this in mind when discussing *The Ring and the Book* and the *Idylls*.<sup>570</sup> By implication, he is arguing that the Victorian soul, as manifested in the poetry of the period, is not presented in a satisfactory, or true, way. This is a fundamental difference between 'Victorian' and 'Modern'

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<sup>568</sup> Ibid., p. v.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid., p. xxvii.

<sup>570</sup> *Memoir I*, p. 393.

for Yeats and he implies that the work of Tennyson is irrelevant to the 'soul' of the 1930s, not least by comparison with the poetry of Hopkins, who died in 1889, three years before Tennyson, but who is included in Yeats's anthology.

'A whole Gothic world had come to grief': Faulkner, Greene and Waugh

Both Evelyn Waugh and, in the 1950s, William Faulkner would ultimately have agreed with Yeats's conclusion (albeit for very different reasons), and yet Tennyson's work pervades their novels *Light in August* (1932) and *A Handful of Dust* (1934). In Faulkner's novel, the failed preacher Gail Hightower reminisces about his training as a priest where he was initially afraid of the dark but grew simply to hate it. This leads him to conclude that 'I should never have let myself get out of the habit of prayer'.<sup>571</sup> At this he turns to the wall of his study, seeking a particular volume:

It is Tennyson. It is dogeared. He has had it ever since the seminary. He sits beneath the lamp and opens it. It does not take long. Soon the fine galloping language, the gutless swooning full of sapless trees and dehydrated lusts begins to swim smooth and swift and peaceful. It is better than praying without having to bother to think aloud. It is like listening in a cathedral to a eunuch chanting in a language which he does not even need to not understand.<sup>572</sup>

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<sup>571</sup> William Faulkner, *Light in August* (New York: Harrison Smith & Robert Haas, 1932), p. 301.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid.*

On April 27<sup>th</sup> 1957, Faulkner was asked at the University of Virginia whether he agreed that reading Tennyson was 'like listening in a cathedral to a eunuch'; he replied 'No sir, that was Hightower's opinion, and I'm not responsible for his opinion. I have a different opinion of Tennyson myself, that when I was younger, I read Tennyson with a great deal of pleasure. I can't read him at all now.'<sup>573</sup>

Faulkner does not specify how much 'younger' he was when he enjoyed Tennyson, but the poet has enough of a presence in the novel to suggest that Faulkner was still able to read him in 1933, and the passages involving Tennyson are highly elucidatory. As Hugh M. Ruppersburg has noted, the image of the eunuch in the above quotation is a good analogue for Hightower,<sup>574</sup> who is similarly sterile and ultimately meaningless – and the calm tone in which Hightower thinks about the eunuch, with its soft alliteration of *ch* sounds, is in direct contrast to the brutal racist castration which takes place in his house later in the novel. What Hightower takes from the verse is, in fact, removal from life itself – Tennyson's lust is 'dehydrated', the swooning 'gutless' and the trees 'sapless', bereft of life. But the 'galloping rhythms' render all this unimportant to Hightower who is ultimately lazy – he is happy with the effect of the eunuch's song as he does not have to 'bother to think aloud'; it provides an easier comfort than prayer. This is in keeping with his earlier preaching – Byron Bunch is told that the preacher was famous for 'using religion as though it were a dream [...] a sort of cyclone that did not even need to touch the actual earth.'<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> William Faulkner, *Faulkner in the University* ed. Frederick Landis Gwynn and Joseph Leo Blotner (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1995), p. 93.

<sup>574</sup> Hugh M. Ruppersburg, *Reading Faulkner: Light in August* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994), p. 187.

<sup>575</sup> *Light in August*, p. 56.

Hightower's inertia ultimately results in the death of the central character of the novel, the mixed race outcast Joe Christmas, who kills his white lover Joanna Burden after she repeatedly urges him to get an education at the onset of her menopause. Hightower's confidant Byron Bunch asks the preacher to give Christmas an alibi, but he will not make a commitment and, once Christmas has escaped from custody and fled to Hightower's house, it is too late and the racist policeman Percy Grimm shoots and castrates Christmas. The earlier unthinking turn to Tennyson can be said to represent Hightower's turn away from the world and his responsibilities as a Christian; and yet Tennyson has made an impression on him. Just after the murder, Hightower looks out of his window:

Now the final copper light of afternoon fades; now the street beyond  
the low maples and the low signboard is prepared and empty,  
framed by the study window like a stage.<sup>576</sup>

The first part of this sentence is reminiscent of Section CXV of *In Memoriam*:

Now fades the last long streak of snow,  
Now burgeons every maze of quick  
About the flowering squares, and thick  
By ashen roots the violets blow.<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>576</sup> Ibid., p. 441.

<sup>577</sup> *In Memoriam* CXV lines 1-4, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 967.

The passage from Faulkner quoted above is similarly melancholic, and even contains a half-rhyme, of 'fades' and 'stage', enough to suggest that Hightower's own 'regret' at the death of Joe Christmas is budding and blossoming like the 'April violet' of Tennyson's poem.<sup>578</sup> However, while the passage from *In Memoriam* appears near the end of the poem and is a melancholic counterpoint to a dominant tone of increasing optimism, there is a lot less hope in Hightower's vision, which comes at evening, in August, at the end of summer. Even at the very end of the novel, where Hightower feels as though he is dying, his reveries are still marked by Tennyson. One of the complaints against his preaching was that he frequently mixed up religion with his grandfather's Civil War past, where he was shot in a cavalry charge. His final vision in the novel is of another charge, which travels past him:

Yet, leaning forward in the window, his bandaged head huge and  
without depth upon the twin blobs of his hands upon the ledge, it  
seems to him that he still hears them: the wild bugles and the  
clashing sabres and the dying thunder of hooves.<sup>579</sup>

Even if this vision of speed and clamour is remote in tone from Tennyson's 'The splendour falls on castle walls', the way in which Hightower's vision is phrased suggests that the Tennyson he reads for unthinking comfort has remained with him. The first verse of Tennyson's song ends:

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<sup>578</sup> Line 19, *ibid.*

<sup>579</sup> *Light in August*, p. 467.

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,

Blow, bugle; answer, echoes, dying, dying, dying.<sup>580</sup>

Faulkner's 'wild bugles' and 'dying thunder' may be at odds with Tennyson's words in terms of what they are describing, but the associations between the words remain for Hightower. Although Tennyson is only ever associated with this lazy, ponderous character in *Light in August*, his work resonates in Hightower's mind, in spite of his inertia.

One would expect Faulkner the experimental American novelist to have less sympathy for Tennyson than the Catholic British conservative Evelyn Waugh. In Waugh's 1934 novel *A Handful of Dust*, an entire congregation mirrors Hightower's lack of effort and thought in religious rituals: the churchgoers attend every week despite the fact that 'few of the things said in church seemed to have any particular reference to themselves.'<sup>581</sup> This is not an attack on the parishioners specifically, but on the world of 1930s England, so far removed from its Catholic past which, for Waugh, represents true salvation. The epigraph to Waugh's novel leaves the reader in little doubt where its title is derived from:

*'...I will show you something different from either  
Your shadow at morning striding behind you  
Or your shadow at evening rising to meet you;  
I will show you fear in a handful of dust.'*

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<sup>580</sup> 'The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls' lines 5-6, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 783

<sup>581</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *A Handful of Dust* ed. Robert Murray Davis (London: Penguin, 2000), p. 34.

*The Waste Land*<sup>582</sup>

That Waugh expected his readers to know the poem is clear from the omission of Eliot's name from the quotation. Critics have long assumed that the title is drawn from this poem: 'The title is, of course, taken from *The Waste Land*' (David Lodge, 1971); 'the title of the novel, derived from *The Waste Land*' (Shelley Walia, 1998); 'the imprint of Eliot is there throughout the text and signalled unmistakably in the title' (Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, 2002).<sup>583</sup> But both Eliot and Waugh (whose father wrote the most important biography of Tennyson published prior to Hallam Tennyson's *Memoir* and who edited a seven-volume set of Tennyson in 1905) knew that, as we have seen, the phrase could also be found in 'Maud':

Dead, long dead,

Long dead!

And my heart is a handful of dust,

And the wheels go over my head,

And my bones are shaken with pain [...]<sup>584</sup>

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<sup>582</sup> Frontispiece to *ibid.*

<sup>583</sup> David Lodge, *Evelyn Waugh* (London: Columbia University Press, 1971), p.27; Shelley Walia, *Evelyn Waugh: Witness to Decline* (New Delhi: Sterling, 1998), p.90; Avril Horner and Sue Zlosnik, 'Unreal cities and undead legacies: T.S. Eliot and Gothic hauntings in Waugh's *A Handful of Dust* and Barnes's *Nightwood*', in *Special Relationships: Anglo-American Affinities and Antagonisms 1854-1936* ed. Janet Beer & Bridget Bennett (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.226.

<sup>584</sup> 'Maud' II.V.i lines 239-243, *The Poems of Tennyson*, pp.1086-7.

The word 'handful' unquestionably links Tennyson and Eliot (as well as Conrad and Donne), but the source of this dust is Biblical – in Genesis 3.19 God tells Adam 'dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return'. The contrast between the modern world and its Victorian past, which are both rejected as inadequate in comparison with true Catholic belief, is the central theme of the novel. This title – at once Modernist and Victorian, but ultimately biblical – is therefore a neat representation of the book as a whole. However, the dominant Tennyson poem referred to in the book is not 'Maud', but *Idylls of the King*. At the beginning of the novel, Tony Last and his wife Brenda dine in the large hall of his country house, Hetton Abbey, 'at a small, round table'; the rooms of their house are named after Arthurian characters, 'each with a frieze of Gothic text, each named from Malory, Yseult, Elaine, Mordred and Merlin, Gawaine and Bedivere, Lancelot, Perceval, Tristram, Galahad, his own dressing-room, Morgan le Fay, and Brenda's Guinevere.'<sup>585</sup> In the most comprehensive assessment of Tennyson's presence in *A Handful of Dust*, Richard Wasson has called the novel a 'critique of Victorianism', in which the Victorians are the 'chief cultural villains.'<sup>586</sup> While this is to overstate matters – as Wasson himself notes, the point is that the world-views of both the Victorian age and the 1930s are fundamentally flawed – it is nonetheless clear that, despite Tony Last being a sympathetic character, he is ultimately as wrong-headed as his uncaring wife.

That Tony's view of the world is coloured by the Victorian age is made clear in the scene when he finds out, over the telephone, that Brenda has

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<sup>585</sup> *A Handful of Dust*, p.24; *ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>586</sup> Richard Wasson, 'A Handful of Dust: Critique of Victorianism', *Modern Fiction Studies* 7 (Winter 1961) p. 327.



decided to sue him for alimony, after she has left him and he has complied with her request to make it look as if *he* was cuckolding *her*.

He hung up the receiver and went back to the smoking room. His mind had suddenly become clearer on many points that had puzzled him. A whole Gothic world had come to grief... there was now no armour glittering through the forest glades, no embroidered feet on the green sward; the cream and dappled unicorns had fled...<sup>587</sup>

This passage highlights the central opposition in the novel: Tony's aristocratic, chivalrous, predominantly rural world view is confronted by amoral modern urban society. Even after this image (whose alliterations suggest Tony believes it a *poetic* vision) has fled him, and the world 'come to grief', he remains committed to the Arthurian ideal. In the fifth part of the book – entitled 'In Search of a City' – Tony bumps into Dr. Messinger at his club and the pair set off on an expedition on the trail of a mythical, unnamed city. This expedition is often overlooked in synopses of the novel, perhaps because critics are aware that Waugh had written an alternative ending – however, in a letter to Henry Yorke he spelt out the reason for keeping the section:

The Amazon stuff had to be there. The scheme was a Gothic man in the hands of savages – first Mrs Beaver etc. then the real ones,

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<sup>587</sup> *A Handful of Dust*, p. 153.

finally the silver foxes at Hetton. All that quest for the city seems to me justifiable symbolism.<sup>588</sup>

If anything, the narrative voice becomes more Tennysonian after Tony Last's betrayal by his wife. In the jungle, 'bats like blighted fruit hung in clusters from the thatch and great spiders rode across it astride their shadows'.<sup>589</sup> The phrase 'bats like blighted fruit' recalls 'Maud', with its 'black bat, night' – 'black' and 'night' have merged into 'blighted'.<sup>590</sup> The use of Tennysonian language in this passage, which is focalised through Tony, fits in with Wasson's argument about his misguided venture to discover the lost city. Tony Last 'can conceive only of a romantic quest, not a truly religious one', and "The City" he seeks is not the Holy City, the City of God, but rather a transfigured Hetton. His journey is to Camelot, not to Rome.<sup>591</sup> Wasson equates Tony's idealisation of Hetton ('a coral citadel crowning a green hill top sewn with daisies, among groves and streams')<sup>592</sup> with Tennyson's 'The Holy Grail':

The sacred mount of Camelot,  
And all the dim rich city, roof by roof,  
Tower after tower, spire beyond spire,  
By grove, and garden-lawn, and rushing brook[...].<sup>593</sup>

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<sup>588</sup> Letter to Henry Yorke, September 1934, *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh* ed. Mark Amory (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), p. 88.

<sup>589</sup> *A Handful of Dust*, p. 169.

<sup>590</sup> 'Maud' I.XXII.i line 851, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1075.

<sup>591</sup> Wasson, p. 331.

<sup>592</sup> *A Handful of Dust*, p. 164.

<sup>593</sup> 'The Holy Grail', lines 227-230, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1668.

The idealised (if impossible) quest represented in *Idylls of the King* is totally out of place in the 1930s and, for Waugh, even in the nineteenth century, as it is not concerned with real (for Waugh, this can be read as 'Catholic') salvation, but a false image based in the material world. The idea of the 'holy city' is an eternal delusion – the true 'Holy City' has to be internal.

Tony Last's view of the world is definitely material – and specifically architectural. As he finally succumbs to a fever, in the company of a strange resident of the jungle named Todd who has employed Tony to read Dickens to him until his death, he has a vision of Brenda and says:

I will tell you what I have learned in the forest, where time is different. There is no City. Mrs Beaver has covered it with chromium plating and converted it into flats. Three guineas a week, each with a separate bathroom. Very suitable for base love. And Polly will be there. She and Mrs Beaver under the fallen battlements...<sup>594</sup>

The 'chromium plating' represents the modern world, and for Tony, it is this world that has destroyed his vision of Hetton as the City. However, if we look back to the earlier descriptions of Hetton, we find that his ancestral home is itself just as false as the chromium. According to a fictional guidebook, Hetton, '*formerly one of the notable houses of the county, was entirely rebuilt in 1864 in the Gothic*

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<sup>594</sup> *A Handful of Dust*, p. 212.

style and is now devoid of interest.<sup>595</sup> For Tony, Hetton and its contents are 'things of tender memory and proud possession', but

They were not in the fashion, he fully realized. Twenty years ago people had liked half timber and old pewter; now it was urns and colonnades; but the time would come, perhaps in John Andrew's day, when opinion would reinstate Hetton in its proper place. Already it was referred to as 'amusing', and a very civil young man had asked permission to photograph it for an architectural review.<sup>596</sup>

Hetton, rebuilt in a quasi-medieval fashion in 1864, is in effect a bogus attempt at continuing the national heritage, by an aristocracy who are the most visible living presence of such a heritage. The analogy one can draw with *Idylls of the King* – an updated version of a national myth by a poet who was soon to accept a peerage – is clear. Waugh was aware of the virtues of Tennyson's work (he used 'Someone had blundered' as a punch-line in his 1938 novel *Scoop*, and would use Tennyson to again undermine a major character in 1948's *The Loved One*), but in *A Handful of Dust* he launches a sustained attack on 'English Gothic', so beloved of the Victorians, and its poetic equivalent, Tennyson.<sup>597</sup>

Another Catholic writer who was coming to prominence in the 1930s was Graham Greene. Although he categorised several of his novels as

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<sup>595</sup> Ibid., p. 17. It seems likely that the 'very civil young man' in question is meant to be John Betjeman.

<sup>596</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>597</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Scoop* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1938), p. 314.

'entertainments', as opposed to the more serious term 'novel', the thrillers he wrote in the 1930s are worthy of study in their own right, and in many ways an 'entertainment' like *A Gun for Sale* (1936) is as sophisticated as the more 'literary' *The Power and the Glory* (1940). Both contain references to Tennyson's work, which serve less to criticise the poetry itself than to draw connections between the world Tennyson is describing in 'the Brook' and 'Maud' and that of Greene's grimly realistic fiction. *The Power and the Glory* is, according to John Updike, 'generally agreed to be Graham Greene's masterpiece', and is certainly the author's least English work, in terms of its setting, which is in Mexico during the anti-Catholic persecutions of the mid-1920s.<sup>598</sup> It is also un-English in terms of its focus on Catholicism, with the hero of the story a 'whiskey priest' who continues to fulfil his religious duties even in the face of potential arrest and murder. The narrative follows him around a province of Mexico as he tries to evade arrest, and he comes across a house which belongs to an English family. He has not eaten for days and fights with a dog over a bone, before coming across a book, which to him is 'almost like a promise, mildewing there under the piles, of better things to come.'<sup>599</sup> The book is an anthology of verse, *Jewels Five Words Long*, and the priest opens it on a page with Tennyson's 'The Brook:

'I come,' he read, 'from haunts of coot and hern,

I make a sudden sally,

And sparkle out among the fern,

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<sup>598</sup> John Updike, 'Introduction' to Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (London: Vintage, 2005), p. v.

<sup>599</sup> Graham Greene, *The Power and the Glory* (London: William Heinemann, 1940), p. 182.

To bicker down a valley.<sup>600</sup>

The priest, whose knowledge of English comes from time spent at a seminary in America, believes the vocabulary of the poem 'very obscure', but he can understand the conclusion:

These verses ended on a philosophical note – "For men may come and men may go, But I go on for ever." The triteness and untruth of "for ever" shocked him a little: a poem like this ought not to be in a child's hands.<sup>601</sup>

As the priest sees vultures in the yard, the immortality of nature as described in the poem offers him little comfort in his situation, and directly contradicts his Catholic beliefs. He finds the desperation of the next poem he reads, Thomas Campbell's 'Lord Ullin's Daughter', much more amenable to his state of mind. However, as history (and the novel) shows, the sentiment of the poem the priest reads is more pertinent than he thinks. The novel ends with his death, but with a vision of the Catholic religion continuing in Mexico, despite the ban, and the existence of more roaming priests who can perform the sacred rites.

In the earlier 'entertainment' (the distinctions have stopped appearing in more recent editions of his work) *A Gun for Sale*, Tennyson's 'Maud' appears at several important stages in the narrative, which again features a hero with compromised morals on the run. Raven, a hitman, has killed the Czech Minister

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<sup>600</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>601</sup> Ibid., p. 184.

of war, but on his return he is paid in stolen notes and goes after Davis, the man who hired him. The murder triggers an international crisis akin to the start of the First World War, and Raven flees to Nottwich, a midlands town very similar to Nottingham, where his employer has also travelled. Raven is a wanted man, and as he shelters between two semi-detached houses, he hears their residents flicking between radio stations:

On the National Programme from the other house an elderly critic was reading verse. Raven couldn't help but hear, standing in the cold garage by the baby's pram, staring out at the black hail:

'A shadow flits before me,  
No thou, but like to thee;  
Ah Christ, that it were possible  
For one short hour to see  
The souls we loved, that they might tell us  
What and where they be.'

He dug his nails into his hands, remembering his father who had been hanged and his mother who had killed herself in the basement kitchen, all the long parade of those who had done him down.<sup>602</sup>

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<sup>602</sup> Graham Greene, *A Gun For Sale* (London: William Heinemann, 1936), pp. 88-9.

The love lyric from 'Maud' moves him, as the memory of his dead parents recurs to him, and the following lines upset him even more:

'And I loathe the squares and streets,  
and the faces that one meets,  
Hearts with no love for me...'

He thought: give her time and she too will go to the police.  
That's what always happens in the end with a skirt,

– 'My whole soul out to thee' –

trying to freeze again as hard and safe as ever, the icy fragment.<sup>603</sup>

The phrase 'hearts with no love for me' reminds him of Anne, a chorus girl whom he met on the train to Nottwich and who he fears, wrongly, will expose him as the fugitive gunman. This is where the two works begin to inform each other in a telling way. Raven is deformed as the result of a botched operation to repair his hare lip, and truly believes himself to be unloved in the world, spurned by his family, employer and friends, much as the protagonist of 'Maud' is an outsider who loses his intended as a result of social pressures. 'Maud' is a poem whose frenzied narrator is the end product of a social system which is deeply corrupt, and who is elevated to the status of an unreliable anti-hero in the work.

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<sup>603</sup> Ibid., p. 89.



The relevance of this to Raven is shown in his occasionally inappropriate recollections of Tennyson's work. His desire for companionship with Anne, and the hope for her trust, brings 'Maud' back to Raven as he searches for her body (she has been suffocated and is near death) in a lodging-house: 'Because he was an outlaw she had to be an outlaw too. "Ah, Christ! that it were possible"'.<sup>604</sup> In the final moments of his life he again remembers the poem. He finds himself cornered after killing both Davis and the man above him, a steel tycoon whose products will rise in cost with the advent of a war. 'The climate of his mind' at this point is formed by many quotations, including the same part of 'Maud': 'the cultivated unlive voice of the elderly critic reading *Maud*: "Oh, that 'twere possible after long grief," while he stood in the garage and felt the ice melt at his heart with a sense of pain and strangeness. It was as if he were passing the customs of a land he had never entered before and would never be able to leave.'<sup>605</sup> The poem recurs to Raven as a symbol of his longing for a normal life, as part of the social fabric rather than a deformed outcast, much as the protagonist of 'Maud' yearns for society, manifested by Maud's brother, to accept his love as true. That such a tortured account of lost love and madness should be seen as a symbol of hope is testament to the depravity of society as much as to the ignorance of Raven. It is interesting that Raven remembers the poetry as spoken by a 'cultivated unlive voice'. As we have seen, in the 1920s the BBC frequently broadcast readings from Tennyson, yet Greene's mention of the elderly critic's tone of voice indicates his awareness of how inappropriate such a violent, deranged poem is for the audience of the 'National Programme', and how

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<sup>604</sup> Ibid., p. 133.

<sup>605</sup> Ibid., p. 236.

the prolonged acquaintance with Tennyson has led to his being presented in a manner that is easy to listen to, but which masks the true power of his verse.

Faulkner, Waugh and Greene all clearly appreciated the merits of Tennyson's verse; Faulkner associated it with lethargy in *Light in August* and had little real enthusiasm for it; in *A Handful of Dust* the poetry is part of a tradition which is removed from the one true salvation, the Catholic church, whereas Greene observes the similarities and parallels, be they for better or worse, between the situations Tennyson was describing and his own very imperfect world; in this he has more in common with Faulkner than Waugh.

### Tennyson in *Finnegans Wake*

No matter how popular the work of these three authors was in the 1930s, the shadow of one novelist loomed over all other writers of fiction in the period. Parts of James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (whose title was kept secret until its publication in 1939) had been circulating since 1926, and its form is so radically different that to this day it defies any full interpretation, remaining one of the most difficult books written in the twentieth century. This is a long way from the 'Tennysonian' verse we saw Joyce writing in the 1900s, and yet as we have seen, early in *Finnegans Wake* the novelist seems to acknowledge a debt to Tennyson, where he says that his poetic career 'began Tuonisonian'.<sup>606</sup>

The main 'story' of the novel – if it can be described as such – concerns a man named Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker, who owns a pub in the Dublin

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<sup>606</sup> James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake* (London: Penguin, 1992), p. 48.

suburb of Chapelizod. The book dwells on his relationship with his wife, Anna Livia Plurabelle, and the effect on this relationship of a shameful act committed by Earwicker in Phoenix Park, where it appears he watched two women urinate and possibly exposed himself to them; this is also linked to an incestuous desire for his daughter. Despite these apparent 'themes', the real 'narrative' of *Finnegans Wake* is elusive. Characters regularly change appearance and name, and appear and reappear in the flow of the novel's language. For example, the character 'Butt', a comedian whom we see on television, claims that he

was in the Reilly Oirish Krzerszone Miliesia asundurst Sirdarthar Woolwichleagues, good tomkeys years somewhere in Crimealian wall samewhere in Ayerland, during me weeping stillstumms over the freshprosts of Eastchept and the dangling garters of Marrowbone and daring my wapping stiltstunts on Bostion Moss, old stile and new style and heave a lep onwards.<sup>607</sup>

'The Charge of the Light Brigade' recurs throughout this passage – in the references to 'leagues', 'Crimealian Wall', and the end of the sentence. It is worth dwelling on why, exactly, 'Butt' says that he has been 'somewhere in Crimealian wall samewhere in Ayerland'. The passage is full of stereotypical literalisations of 'Irish' pronunciation, and yet it also draws together the Irish with soldiers 'somewhere' else – both the Crimea and London ('Wapping' appears, 'Eastchept' suggests City names like Whitechapel and East Cheap, and 'Marrowbone'

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<sup>607</sup> Ibid., p. 347.

suggests Marylebone). Military aggression – intrinsically linked to Tennyson – is seen as common to Irish, Russian and English.

Maintaining the link between Tennyson and war in *Finnegans Wake*, the historical figure most closely associated with the poet in the book (and, thanks to Tennyson's 1852 ode on his death, in English literature) is the Duke of Wellington. Late in the novel, four characters are lost in Phoenix Park in Dublin, where a signpost begins to talk: 'To the dunleary obelisk via the rock vhat myles knox furlongs, to the general's postoffice howsands of patience; to the Wellington memorial half a league wrongwards.'<sup>608</sup> Wellington is a prominent figure in *Finnegans Wake*, and is frequently subjected to bawdy mockery – as Vincent J. Cheng has noted, despite his favourite horse, Copenhagen, being black, there are many references to 'His same white harse' near the beginning of the book.<sup>609</sup> If we look at the later description of the Duke as a 'bornstable ghentleman', we come to understand this apparent hostility.<sup>610</sup> Wellington was born in Ireland, but fought for the British at Waterloo, going on to become Prime Minister. Despite for many years being called a 'sepoy general' owing to his Irish parentage, he was far from complimentary about his fellow Irishmen, remarking of his roots, 'because a man is born in a stable that does not make him a horse'.<sup>611</sup>

So far, we could conclude that the association drawn between Tennyson and Wellington is firmly anti-English (and anti-adopted English). However, to do

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<sup>608</sup> Ibid., pp. 566-7.

<sup>609</sup> Vincent J. Cheng, *Joyce, Race and Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.266; *Finnegans Wake*, p. 8.

<sup>610</sup> Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>611</sup> Quoted in Elizabeth Longford, *Wellington: The Years of the Sword* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), p. 129.

this would be to ignore the other figures associated with Wellington in the book – not least Humphry Chimpden Earwicker himself. The passage which begins ‘To the dunleary obelisk’ makes clear reference to the Wellington Memorial in Phoenix Park – ‘the Wellington memorial half a league wrongwards.’<sup>612</sup> The Memorial, which sits in Phoenix Park close to the Liffey, is a squat, phallic obelisk. Wellington is undoubtedly associated with a phallus in the book – phrases like ‘the Willingdone git the band up’, and ‘Sexcaliber hrosspower’ near the beginning of *Finnegans Wake* make this overt, and the echo of ‘Excalibur’ recalls, at least to some degree, Tennyson’s Arthurian poetry.<sup>613</sup> And just as Wellington is a ‘bornstable ghentleman’, so Tennyson was Stephen’s ‘gentleman poet’ in *Ulysses*.

The focus on the Memorial also recalls the central event in *Finnegans Wake*, which motivates all the various episodes therein – Earwicker’s shameful encounter in the Park. The many references to the phallic Memorial, so close to Earwicker’s pub in Chapelizod, refer not only to the physical obelisk but also serve as metaphors for Earwicker’s penis, and to reinforce this he is linked to Wellington the *person* as well as his memorial obelisk. *Finnegans Wake* contains many three-letter phrases which correspond to the initials ‘HCE’ (Humphrey Chimpden Earwicker) or ‘ALP’ (Anna Livia Plurabelle) and one of these is ‘How Copenhagen ended’ – Earwicker is thus linked to Wellington., and both serve as symbols of the masculine.<sup>614</sup> This can be extended to include Tennyson through the focus on the very masculine idea of war in most of the passages which

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<sup>612</sup> *Finnegans Wake*, p. 567.

<sup>613</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>614</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

engage with his work, as well as the association of Tennyson and Wellington. In *Finnegans Wake*, Joyce recognises his 'Tuonisonian' roots, distancing himself from the hostility towards the poet expressed by Stephen Dedalus in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* and *Ulysses*, and assimilates Tennyson into the narrative as an unquestionably masculine voice.

#### 'In my beginning is my end': T. S. Eliot

Given the 'Lines to a Duck in a Park', it seems odd to think of T. S. Eliot as a likely candidate to introduce a 1936 edition of Tennyson's work. However, he did indeed write such an essay (mainly on *In Memoriam*), which makes up part of a reassessment of Tennyson going on in Eliot's work of the mid- to late 1930s. In 1934 Eliot was approached by George Bell, Bishop of Chichester, who, impressed by Eliot's dramatic work *The Rock*, asked the poet if he would agree to write a play for the 1935 Canterbury Festival. The only stipulation was that it had to have some connection with Canterbury, and it is not hard to see why Eliot chose, like several others who had written plays for previous festivals, the subject of Thomas À Becket's murder in Canterbury Cathedral. The play's first director, Martin Browne, said that Eliot did not contemplate any other subject for his play.<sup>615</sup> Focusing on a small, but very significant period in Becket's life – his return to Canterbury in 1170 and subsequent murder by four of Henry II's followers – the play is a meditation on the idea of Christian martyrdom as much as anything else, which is depicted in a strongly positive light, unsurprising given

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<sup>615</sup> Lyndall Gordon, *Eliot's New Life* (Oxford: OUP, 1988), p. 28.

Eliot's conversion to the Church of England in 1927. Reviews of the play were almost universally favourable, and in Peter Ackroyd's words, 'It seemed that Eliot had at last found his great theme, by discovering a way in which to combine his poetry and his faith in a satisfying formal unity.'<sup>616</sup>

What is often overlooked in criticism of Eliot's play are the similarities with a play by Tennyson.<sup>617</sup> In his later years the laureate took to writing verse drama, with mixed results at best. The most successful of his plays was *Becket*, written in 1879 but not produced until 1893, when it met with almost universal acclaim thanks in part to the performance of the Shakespearean actor Henry Irving in the lead role, and also surely thanks to the death of the poet the previous year. The play was revived at the Canterbury Festivals of 1932 and 1933, which means that Eliot's audience will have been familiar with the text of Tennyson's play and indeed the story: the play which was produced in between Tennyson's play and *Murder in the Cathedral* was *The Young King*, by a staunch Tennysonian, Laurence Binyon, which details events in the reign of Henry II after Becket's death. Tennyson's play takes place over a longer stretch of time than that of Eliot: it charts Becket's instalment as archbishop to his death, and it is also more concerned with historical facts: significantly, Eliot's Archbishop only refers to a knight by his Christian name once.

Despite this apparent difference in approaches to history, Tennyson and Eliot do seem to be using the same sources, and the latter is happy to have parts

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<sup>616</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *T. S. Eliot* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1984), p. 226.

<sup>617</sup> Two critics who have focused on Tennyson's influence on *Murder in the Cathedral* are Alethea Hayter in 'Thomas À Becket and the Dramatists', *Essays by Divers Hands* 34 (1966), pp. 90-105, and David Seed in 'Eliot's Use of Tennyson in *Murder in the Cathedral*', *Yeats-Eliot Review* 7.1-2 (1982), pp. 42-49.

of his play echo those of the earlier poet. In *Becket*, Hilary, Bishop of Chichester, reacts to Becket's refusal to submit to the King in council by asking:

For hath not thine ambition set the Church  
This day between the hammer and the anvil –  
Fealty to the King, obedience to thy self?<sup>618</sup>

Eliot's Third Priest asks 'What peace can be found / To grow between the hammer and the anvil?'.<sup>619</sup> The phrase was used in a letter from the Canterbury suffragans to the Papal legates in 1169.<sup>620</sup> And where Tennyson's Becket says 'Undo the doors: the church is not a castle',<sup>621</sup> Eliot's says

Unbar the doors! throw open the doors!  
I will not have the house of prayer, the church of Christ,  
The sanctuary, turned into a fortress.<sup>622</sup>

The phrase is a famous one, repeated frequently in accounts of Becket's death,<sup>623</sup> but seeing an actor playing Becket in Canterbury voicing it must have immediately recalled the earlier play to Eliot's audience, and thus the two poet-dramatists draw closer together.

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<sup>618</sup> Tennyson, *Becket* I. iii, *The Works of Tennyson* ed. Hallam Tennyson (London: Macmillan, 1913), p. 710.

<sup>619</sup> Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral, Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 241.

<sup>620</sup> See Michael Staunton, *The Lives of Thomas Becket* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001), p. 113.

<sup>621</sup> Tennyson, *Becket* V. iii, *The Works of Tennyson* ed. Hallam Tennyson, p. 747.

<sup>622</sup> Eliot, *Murder in the Cathedral, Complete Poems and Plays*, p. 273.

<sup>623</sup> See William Urry, *Thomas Becket: His Last Days* (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1999), p. 124.



Eliot's apparent willingness to at least fail to disguise, if perhaps not to fully reveal, his Tennysonian inspiration is mirrored in criticism he wrote in the 1930s. In 1931, in the preface to Harry Crosby's collection of poetry *Transit of Venus*, he wrote disparagingly of the public affection for the poetry of Ella Wheeler Wilcox, which gave its readership pleasure 'without the comparatively immense mental effort needed to enjoy the work of her masters, Tennyson, Browning, and Swinburne'.<sup>624</sup> One could argue that this seemingly new-found respect for the Victorians was motivated by the public response to *The Waste Land*. We have already witnessed the perceived dominance of the poem as identified by Brian Howard in 1930. Eliot was cautious of any such cult, and indeed of being seen as the voice of a generation, and one of the most often-cited statements he made negating this idea runs:

It happens now and then that a poet by some strange accident expresses the mood of his generation, at the same time that he is expressing a mood of his own which is quite remote from that of his generation.<sup>625</sup>

The tone of this – 'a poet', 'he' – looks similar to the Eliot who wrote 'Tradition and the Individual Talent' in 1919, an essay often interpreted as autobiographical despite its sentiments. But while Eliot's opinions in the above passage can be (and often are) interpreted as a comment on the fate of *The Waste Land*, the

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<sup>624</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Preface' to Harry Crosby, *Transit of Venus* (Paris: Black Sun Press, 1931), pp. ii-iii.

<sup>625</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction' to *Poems of Tennyson* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1936), p. xv.

poet to whom he is referring here is not himself – it is, in fact, Tennyson. The statement first appeared in an essay which formed the introduction to a 480-page selection of Tennyson's verse, published by Nelson in 1936, accompanied by a stand-alone edition of the *Idylls of the King* as well as another volume of Tennyson's later poetry. In the introduction, we read that Tennyson 'had the finest sense of verbal music of any English poet since Milton', and Eliot praises his 'innovation in metric' as well as his classical learning.<sup>626</sup> Although Tennyson had 'no gift at all' for narrative,<sup>627</sup> Eliot saw in his work 'plenty of evidence of emotional intensity and violence'<sup>628</sup> in a remarkably prescient piece of criticism – Tennyson's childhood was immensely traumatic, as his father was disinherited and became an abusive alcoholic, treating his family very badly, but this was only just beginning to come to the attention of the public, with Charles Tennyson's article 'Tennyson Papers I: Alfred's Father', published in the *Cornhill Magazine* in March 1936. In this article the poet's grandson outlined the 'intense and violent' moods of Tennyson's father, which caused the young poet 'often to run out into the night in utter misery and cast himself weeping down amongst the tombstones.'<sup>629</sup> Charles Tennyson also revealed that Alfred's father would not let him attend school 'till he had shown himself able to recite by heart all the four books of Horace's *Odes* on successive mornings.'<sup>630</sup>

In Eliot's *Essays Ancient and Modern*, published in 1936, the Tennyson piece bore the simple title 'In Memoriam', and the long elegy stands out for Eliot

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<sup>626</sup> Ibid., p. ix

<sup>627</sup> Ibid., p. xii.

<sup>628</sup> Ibid., p. xiii.

<sup>629</sup> Charles Tennyson, 'Tennyson Papers: I. Alfred's Father', *Cornhill Magazine* 153 (March 1936), p. 290.

<sup>630</sup> Ibid., p. 300.

as the work in which 'Tennyson finds full expression'; he believed it to be 'a diary of which we have to read every word'.<sup>631</sup> The passage concerning the voice of a generation is made in a longer section detailing the poem's initial reception as an assertion of Christian faith. While Eliot notes that Tennyson 'consistently asserted a convinced, if somewhat sketchy, Christian belief', he identifies another 'Tennyson' in the poem – 'a very much more interesting and tragic Tennyson'.<sup>632</sup> This Tennyson antedates Darwin in his evolutionary ideas (although Eliot curiously omits any mention of Lyell, whom Tennyson had read), and *In Memoriam* is religious 'because of the quality of its doubt' – Tennyson is 'the great master of metric as well as of melancholia'.<sup>633</sup>

Eliot chose examples to highlight his points: he believed that in 'Mariana' there exists 'something wholly new':

All day within the dreamy house,  
The doors upon their hinges creak'd;  
The blue fly sung in the pane; the mouse  
Behind the mouldering wainscot shriek'd,  
Or from the crevice peer'd about.<sup>634</sup>

For Eliot, the power of this passage is in Tennyson's ability 'to make the object real by arousing several senses at once; here the old house is not only seen, but

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<sup>631</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction', p. xiv; *ibid.*, p. xv.

<sup>632</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xv-xvi.

<sup>633</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

<sup>634</sup> *Ibid.*, p. x.

heard, touched, and even smelt'.<sup>635</sup> And he also singled out a particular verse from *In Memoriam* for praise as 'great poetry' (albeit accepting that it is only a part of *In Memoriam*, whose form is its greatness) – the 'dark house' stanza.

With this prose re-evaluation of Tennyson published, Eliot was able to acknowledge his debt to Tennyson in his poetry. 'East Coker', the second of Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which was first published in 1940, begins:

In my beginning is my end. In succession  
Houses rise and fall, crumble, are extended,  
Are removed, destroyed, restored, or in their place  
Is an open field, or a factory, or a by-pass.  
Old stone to new building, old timber to new fires,  
Old fires to ashes, and ashes to the earth  
Which is already flesh, fur and faeces,  
Bone of man and beast, cornstalk and leaf.  
Houses live and die: there is a time for building  
And a time for living and for generation  
And a time for the wind to break the loosened pane  
And to shake the wainscot where the field-mouse trots  
And to shake the tattered arras woven with a silent motto.<sup>636</sup>

Eliot's attitude to quoting Tennyson has clearly changed since he published *The Waste Land*. In the earlier poem he drew the reader's attention to the scope of

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<sup>635</sup> Ibid.

<sup>636</sup> 'East Coker' lines 1-13, *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 177.

classical allusion within his verse; in 'East Coker' he apparently wants to display his use of Tennyson to his readers, as the lines of 'Mariana' to which he alludes in the passage above had been highlighted by the poet himself just four years previously, in an essay which has been included in his own *Selected Essays* since 1951.

As Carl Plasa has noted, the text of 'East Coker' in the quotation above is performing what it is describing.<sup>637</sup> One can interpret 'house' as 'poem' and 'stone' as 'language', and both the new building and Eliot's new poem are different from their predecessors despite their shared 'stone'. The cyclical nature of both literary and human history, destruction and rebuilding, a key concern in 'East Coker', is further implied when we remember a passage from 'Maud', where the narrator talks about the silence of his 'empty house', which is punctuated by 'the shrieking rush of the wainscot mouse'.<sup>638</sup> The centrality of this image to Eliot is highlighted when we read what has been called the 'Blitz Canto' of 'Little Gidding', the final *Quartet*.

Ash on an old man's sleeve  
Is all the ash the burnt roses leave.  
Dust in the air suspended  
Marks the place where a story ended.  
Dust inbreathed was a house –  
The wall, the wainscot and the mouse.

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<sup>637</sup> Carl Plasa, 'Reading Tennyson in *Four Quartets*: The Example of "East Coker"', *English* 40.166 (1991), p. 243.

<sup>638</sup> 'Maud' I.VI.viii.257-60, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1055.

The death of hope and despair,  
This is the death of air.<sup>639</sup>

For all the suffocating associations implicit in the line, 'Dust inbreathed was a house' can also be read as a statement of continuity and progress. The 'dust inbreathed', which represents the literary tradition as Eliot has received it (and we know that the dust of *The Waste Land* was at least in part Tennysonian) seems to reinforce the central idea of 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', only with an important distinction. Tennyson, and thus by extension all the Victorians, is included in the tradition, the 'dust inbreathed', of *Four Quartets*. That this occurs at the end of Eliot's poetic career is fitting, and soon after we read the above lines, Eliot comes into contact with 'The eyes of a familiar compound ghost / Both intimate and undefinable'.<sup>640</sup> That this is a double is clear when the ghost says that 'speech impelled us / To purify the dialect of the tribe'.<sup>641</sup> The ghost then takes leave of the poet, and we read:

The day was breaking. In the disfigured street  
He left me, with a kind of valediction,  
And faded on the blowing of the horn.<sup>642</sup>

This is perhaps the most clearly Tennysonian passage in all of Eliot's mature poetry. It is a rewriting of the section of *In Memoriam* which Eliot highlighted in

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<sup>639</sup> 'Little Gidding' lines 56-63, *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 192.

<sup>640</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 97-98, p. 193.

<sup>641</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 128-129, p. 194.

<sup>642</sup> *Ibid.*, lines 150-152, p. 195.

his essay – ‘On the bald street breaks the blank day’ – and also incorporates aspects of ‘The splendour falls on castle walls’, another song from *The Princess*, which ends

Blow, bugle, blow, set the wild echoes flying,

And answer, echoes, answer, dying, dying, dying.<sup>643</sup>

As A. Walton Litz has written, at this point in Eliot’s career, ‘all the divisions of his early criticism and poetry are put aside, and Tennyson joins Baudelaire as one of the dead masters of Eliot’s art.’<sup>644</sup>

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<sup>643</sup> ‘The Splendour Falls on Castle Walls’ lines 17-18, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 783.

<sup>644</sup> A. Walton Litz, “‘That strange abstraction, Nature’: T. S. Eliot’s Victorian Inheritance”, in *Nature and the Victorian Imagination*, ed. U. C. Knoepfelmacher and G. B. Tennyson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), p. 488.

## Chapter Seven

### The 1940s

In *The Times* in 1940 alone, quotations from Tennyson's poetry with a word missing were used as crossword clues twenty-four times. This is a marked increase since the 1930s,<sup>645</sup> and his work was clearly felt to be sufficiently well-known for readers to be able to remember – or at least look up – the answers. The idea of Tennyson occupying a prominent place in the national consciousness in wartime was backed up in the *Times Literary Supplement* of October 10, 1942, where the fiftieth anniversary of Tennyson's death was commemorated over several pages. In an article entitled 'Fifty Years After' (taking its inspiration from 'Locksley Hall Sixty Years After'), Harold Hannyngton Child wrote that although 'Tennyson's reputation sank lower than Browning's', 'fifty years pass, and it swings up higher than it ever was.'<sup>646</sup> This is because

time and history have shown that (not to trouble about the prettiness) all the richest of the sensuous and emotional beauty of Tennyson's verse might have passed out of mind, but for his constant truth to his very un-French, very English self, which insisted upon singing of morals, of evolution, of government and other such English or Philistine matters.<sup>647</sup>

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<sup>645</sup> For example, there were 5 similar clues in 1932.

<sup>646</sup> Harold Hannyngton Child, 'Fifty Years After', *Times Literary Supplement* 2123 (10<sup>th</sup> October 1942), p. 499.

<sup>647</sup> *Ibid.*



It is true that Tennyson occasionally exhibited anti-French sentiments in his work – in *In Memoriam* we read of ‘the red fool-fury of the Seine’, and several of the poems he wrote in opposition to Louis Napoleon in the early 1850s could be construed as xenophobic even if the poet takes pains to explain that his criticisms are only of those French who support Napoleon in his establishment of the Second Empire.<sup>648</sup> At this point in the Second World War, France had been occupied for over two years and yet even this does not excuse the near-xenophobic tone of the article – by implication, it is ‘un-French’ to sing of morals and to acknowledge scientific discoveries. The *Times Literary Supplement* coverage of the anniversary of his death was almost entirely coloured by the war. Hannygnton Child claims that ‘During the half-century since his death three wars have occurred, to open men’s eyes to the true quality of this lately despised poet.’<sup>649</sup> This is strange if one remembers the reaction to the Great War of Harold Nicolson and Hugh l’Anson Fausset, but the title of an earlier article by G. Wilson Knight in the *Times Literary Supplement* makes clear the new, more positive association with the war effort: ‘A Great National Poet: England at War: Tennyson’s Mystic Imperialism’.<sup>650</sup> This article does not concur that part of Tennyson’s appeal lies in his ‘un-French’ nature, and describes his ‘adulatory and military excursions’ as ‘unimportant’, no more than ‘competent laureate hack-work’, preferring his ‘early sonnets on Napoleon and the partition of Poland with their smouldering Miltonic anger.’<sup>651</sup> The editorial of the issue, by Philip

<sup>648</sup> *In Memoriam* CXXVII line 7, *The Poems of Tennyson* p. 977.

<sup>649</sup> *Times Literary Supplement* 2123 (10<sup>th</sup> October 1942), p. 499.

<sup>650</sup> G. Wilson Knight, ‘A Great National Poet’, *ibid.*, p. 498.

<sup>651</sup> *Ibid.*

Tomlinson, leaves the reader in no doubt of Tennyson's relevance to the wartime situation:

The years of disparagement have ended now we are plunged into affairs so perplexing and fearful; and the most capricious criticism never fell into the folly of decrying mastery of verbal music to the poet of so many lines that vibrate in the memory. To-day we acknowledge more than that: our eyes are open to the visionary prophet in the poet.<sup>652</sup>

An earlier article by Tomlinson in the *Times Literary Supplement* of March the 2<sup>nd</sup> 1940 shows that this was not a rashly considered about-turn:

We have lived through a time when Tennyson was pointed to as the typical figure of Victorian smugness and the unending composer of sounds with little sense worth the attention of an adult. To-day, when we have something more immediate in our minds than the dialectics of aesthetic movements, it is significant that we are becoming aware again of the deeper meanings and sweeping effects of some of the Victorian figures – Tennyson, Browning, Matthew Arnold chiefly.<sup>653</sup>

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<sup>652</sup> Philip Tomlinson, 'News & Notes', *ibid.*, p. 493.

<sup>653</sup> Philip Tomlinson, 'Return To Tennyson', *Times Literary Supplement* 1987 (2<sup>nd</sup> March 1940), p. 111.

The 'more immediate' concern, the war, meant that for some critics like Humbert Wolfe, the Victorian world had been rendered 'impossibly remote' from that of the early 1940s, as it had 'died once, risen from the dead, and is again in the death-throes'.<sup>654</sup> This allowed readers to consider Tennyson 'as calmly as though he were an Elizabethan'.<sup>655</sup> And the poet was viewed as a national figure in the period by other writers, in keeping with the views expressed in the *Times Literary Supplement*.

One of the most outspoken advocates of Tennyson's merits was John Betjeman. He established himself from the start of his poetic career as a figure who was happy to admit his debt to the Victorians and in 1933 praised the 'good, vulgar mistakes' of Victorian architects, at the same time criticising the 'refeenment' [*sic*] and 'good taste' of contemporary architecture.<sup>656</sup> Betjeman was openly citing Tennyson as 'a favourite author of mine' in the following year, in an article which suggested Jacob Epstein as the only modern sculptor who could reflect the 'true beauty of Tennyson', which for Betjeman was found in 'his description of landscape, his lyrical qualities, his observation of the minutest forms of nature, and a sense of sky and space engendered in the fens'.<sup>657</sup>

In the introduction to his collection *Old Lights for New Chancels*, published in 1940, one of the main concerns of which is the concept of Englishness in poetry, Betjeman wrote that 'Tennyson, another acute observer, saw England from the Rectory Library or out on the gravel above the arboretum, or up in the

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<sup>654</sup> Humbert Wolfe, 'Introduction' to Tennyson, in *Selections from Tennyson, Browning, Arnold* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1941), p. 385.

<sup>655</sup> Ibid.

<sup>656</sup> John Betjeman, *Ghastly Good Taste* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1933), p. 123.

<sup>657</sup> John Betjeman, 'Jacob Epstein', from *Twelve Jews*, reprinted in *Coming Home: An Anthology of His Prose 1920-1977* ed. Candida Lycett Green (London: Methuen, 1997), p. 61.

family museum, or where the pines rock at the bottom of the garden.<sup>658</sup> He went on to quote two long, relatively obscure passages from *The Brook* and *The Princess* to display Tennyson's flair for describing both the rural working-class and upper-class. Betjeman was always a strong admirer of Tennyson, but admitted that the lines he quoted had probably also been cited 'by those who have other ideas about poetry as examples of bathos.'<sup>659</sup> It is clear that Betjeman understood the apparent divide between 'Modern' and 'Victorian' from the poem 'Myfanwy at Oxford' in the same collection. An unnamed friend waits for Myfanwy Evans, an acquaintance who recurs in Betjeman's poetry (and who would later marry John Piper with whom the poet collaborated on the Shell Guides to Britain), at Oxford Station, and Betjeman offers a glimpse of her early 1930s undergraduate life:

Her Myfanwy as in Cadena days,  
Her Myfanwy, schoolgirl voice,  
Tentative brush of a cheek in a cocoa crush,  
Coffee and Ulysses, Tennyson, Joyce,  
Alpha-minded and other dimensional,  
Freud or Calvary? Take your choice.<sup>660</sup>

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<sup>658</sup> John Betjeman, *Old Lights for New Chancels* (London: John Murray, 1940), p. xiii.

<sup>659</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvii.

<sup>660</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

‘Coffee and Ulysses, Tennyson, Joyce’ suggests that undergraduate debates were ongoing in Oxford in the early 1930s as to which was the preferable Ulysses – that of Tennyson or Joyce.

It is clear that Betjeman admired Tennyson from the form of his poetry – his verse is usually written to a tight metre, with a clear rhyme scheme, and is often concerned with matters of English character and heritage. As Gillian Darley has noted, Betjeman was ‘utterly, balefully English in everything except his hatred of dogs’, and his taste in literature was markedly biased towards writers whose first language was English.<sup>661</sup> His own copy of Tennyson, which is currently held at the Archive of the University of Exeter, betrays a taste for poems with either national or domestic themes – Betjeman leaves crosses beside ‘The Lady of Shalott’, ‘The Miller’s Daughter’, ‘The Gardener’s Daughter’, ‘Audley Court’, ‘Edwin Morris’ and ‘The Brook’, among others. And in a broadcast made on the BBC in 1943, Betjeman cited Tennyson as a quintessentially English figure:

For me, at any rate, England stands for the Church of England, eccentric incumbents, oil-lit churches, Women’s Institutes, modest village inns, arguments about cow parsley on the altar, the noise of mowing machines on Saturday afternoons, local newspapers, local auctions, the poetry of Tennyson, Crabbe, Hardy and Matthew Arnold [...].<sup>662</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> Gillian Darley, ‘The Undesired Result’, *London Review of Books* 27.7 (31<sup>st</sup> March 2005), p. 27.

<sup>662</sup> John Betjeman, ‘Coming Home’, *Coming Home*, p. 141.

Betjeman here cites several of the poets he had already identified in *Old Lights for New Chancels* and as such creates a prototype 'canon' of English poets who represent the nation in its most quintessential character, at a time when Britain was faced with potential destruction.

That Tennyson was felt to have something to offer the British at wartime is clear from the number of times quotations from his work were included in the 'Old and True' column in *The Times* which contained pertinent quotations from history.<sup>663</sup> The BBC also felt that Tennyson's work was sufficiently important to employ T. S. Eliot to reprise his views on the poet as expressed in the 1936 'In Memoriam' essay in an Indian Service broadcast made in 1942. As well as praising Tennyson's dialect poems and his classical scholarship, Eliot dwelt on Tennyson as 'the poet of melancholia, passion and despair.'<sup>664</sup> This seems an odd topic for a propaganda broadcast, but it is linked to national history: Eliot went on to praise *In Memoriam* for its confirmation of Tennyson's status as 'the voice of his time', which is the title of the broadcast.<sup>665</sup> This is in keeping with other critics writing around the same time, such as B. Ifor Evans, who believed it was 'the poem of the poet himself, and, since it is so genuinely his, it becomes at the same time the great poem of his age.'<sup>666</sup> For Eliot, *In Memoriam* is a 'complex and comprehensive expression of an historic phase of thought and feeling, of the grandeur and the tragedy of the Victorian age.'<sup>667</sup> In the elegy, Eliot believes that Tennyson 'foreshadows, not only the Victorian compromise between science and

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<sup>663</sup> Tennyson appeared in 'Old and True' twice in June 1940 alone, in *The Times* 48645 (18<sup>th</sup> June 1940), p. 9, and *ibid*, 48651 (25<sup>th</sup> June 1940), p. 9.

<sup>664</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'The Voice of His Time', *The Listener* 27.683 (12<sup>th</sup> February 1942), p. 211.

<sup>665</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>666</sup> B. Ifor Evans, *A Short History of English Literature* (London: Penguin Books, 1940), p. 60.

<sup>667</sup> 'The Voice of his Time', p. 212.

reasonable religion, not only the optimism of the later nineteenth century about the inevitability of a world in which everybody will gradually be better and happier, but also the insecurity of this optimism.<sup>668</sup> If Eliot's ideas on Tennyson are not quite in keeping with the upbeat tone of Betjeman's war broadcast, both poets are concerned with the establishment of the importance of the Victorian age, and the maintenance of the English tradition, be it poetic or more general.

The association of Tennyson and 'Englishness' was continued in propaganda broadcasts on the other side of the conflict. A debate is ongoing about the wartime activities of P. G. Wodehouse, who consistently denied that he had any interest in politics, but it is nonetheless true that he made several broadcasts while in an internment camp in Germany and was heavily criticised for doing so in the English press.<sup>669</sup> The first broadcast he made only contains passing reference to the political situation, dwelling on what he decided to do (and what to pack) when he was arrested at his home in France. His first decision was 'to buckle down and read the *Complete Works* of William Shakespeare,' but he did acknowledge that after getting through a few plays, 'something of Agatha Christie's catches your eye and you weaken.'<sup>670</sup> This did not stop him from packing the *Works* in his suitcase:

Tobacco, pencils, scribbling pads, pipes, a pair of shoes, a razor,  
some soap, some drawers, a sweater, a couple of cardigans, six  
pairs of socks, Tennyson's poems, half a pound of tea, and, of

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<sup>668</sup> Ibid.

<sup>669</sup> See Robert McCrum, *Wodehouse: A Life* (London: Viking, 2004), pp. 314-324.

<sup>670</sup> Quoted in Frances Donaldson, *P.G. Wodehouse: A Biography* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1982), p. 380.

course, the Complete Works of William Shakespeare. My wife donated a cold mutton chop and a slab of chocolate.<sup>671</sup>

Wodehouse, as we have seen from his novels, was from the beginning to the end of his career a strong admirer of Tennyson, and it is telling that he decides to include his poems as one of the home comforts which he will still be allowed by the Germans – the tea, mutton chop, socks and Shakespeare being the most obviously ‘English’ items on the list.

On the same side of the conflict, but in Italy, Eliot’s ‘miglior fabbro’ Ezra Pound was also keen to promote Tennyson as a quintessentially ‘English’ figure but for more explicitly political ends. In his radio broadcasts Pound decried the decision of Great Britain and the USA to side with Russia, which he attributed, in part, to the influence of ‘The British Broadcasting Company, the Bloody Boobs Corporation’.<sup>672</sup> He went on:

Someone had apparently blundered, as Lord Tennyson wrote of the charge at Balaclava. And blundered, we think, considerably worse.<sup>673</sup>

This ‘blunder’ was to lose touch with ‘continental opinion’, and to rely on journals like *Time Magazine* and *The Times*. In a broadcast made in April 1942, Pound said:

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<sup>671</sup> Ibid.

<sup>672</sup> “*Ezra Pound Speaking*”: *Radio Speeches of World War II* ed. Leonard W. Doob (London: Greenwood Press, 1978), p. 26.

<sup>673</sup> Ibid.



When you are sad and downhearted, git out your back issues of the Times Newspaper of London, if they haven't been confiscated by the dog-catcher to make biscuit for miner's children, and lull yourself with Tennysonian legends, such as 'Dutch leadership in the Indies,' rivalling that of Luzon, resistance, all merry and bright.<sup>674</sup>

Pound mocks the attempts by the Allied media to claim victories and strong resistance in the Dutch East Indies, which were occupied by Japan from 1942-1945, linking Allied leadership to the resistance at Luzon during the Philippine-American War in the early twentieth century, during which a sixth of the population of the island were killed. Such denials of Allied strength were inevitable in Nazi propaganda, but it is interesting that Pound calls them 'Tennysonian legends'. Based on Pound's earlier claims that the poet's 'lady-like attitude toward the printed page [...] kept Tennyson out of his works',<sup>675</sup> and that 'Virgil is a second-rater, a Tennysonianized version of Homer',<sup>676</sup> one could conclude that Pound views Tennyson as a sanitizer, and therefore a falsifier, of Arthurian legends, his versions of which 'lull' the reader, just as what Pound views as untrue stories in *The Times* lull Allied readers in the 1940s.

In May of the same year Pound cited Tennyson again, claiming that he had 'rarely touched' on the poet's work in his broadcasts, and proceeded to quote 'a verse and a fragment', 'Shall come to fight with phantoms and to fall',

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<sup>674</sup> Ibid., p. 90.

<sup>675</sup> 'The Rev. G. Crabbe, L.L.B.', *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound* ed. T.S. Eliot (London: Faber & Faber, 1954), p. 276.

<sup>676</sup> Letter to Iris Barry, 20 July 1916, *The Letters of Ezra Pound, 1907-1941* ed. D. D. Paige (London: Faber & Faber, 1951), p. 138.

which he claims is from the 'Idyls'.<sup>677</sup> Pound himself suggests that because 'I haven't been readin' Tennyson lately', the last word may be 'fail' – the initial 'fall' is correct, but Pound does misquote Tennyson, replacing 'shadows' with 'phantoms' (he also mistakes the line's source; it comes not from the *Idylls* but the opening lines of *The Princess*).<sup>678</sup> This is essential for the rest of the passage:

'Shall come to fight with phantoms and to fall.' I guess it was fall.  
Take it as prophecy. And the phantom that the Anglo-Jew world is  
fighting, or that the Anglo-American is fighting, a Jew usurer  
instigation, is the German PHANTOM, NOT the reality. And that  
phantom has been built out of lies, till the pious and kindly  
American, and simple hearted British boob BY the million believe it,  
see it, hear it. And FAIL to grasp or face the reality.<sup>679</sup>

Pound's idea is that the 'Jew usurers' have created a false impression of Germany – a 'phantom' – which the Allies have been tricked into fighting. The word 'phantom', as opposed to 'shadow', implies an active role on the part of the Jews and so adds a greater potency to Pound's argument.

This misquotation of Tennyson might seem relatively unimportant, but it shows that the poet was being cited in propaganda on both sides of the Second World War, and had not only been accepted as an integral part of the English

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<sup>677</sup> *Ezra Pound Speaking*, p. 137.

<sup>678</sup> *Ibid.*; *The Princess*. line 10, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 751.

<sup>679</sup> *Ezra Pound Speaking*, p. 137.

canon by this point but was viewed as one of the most 'English' of poets in the 1940s.

W. H. Auden: becoming 'Public Cultural Enemy No 1' over Tennyson.<sup>680</sup>

Tennyson appears to have become assimilated into the English canon as a direct result of the conflict between the Allies and the Nazis, much as Woolf criticised his centrality to the canon as a result of what she perceived as his role in an earlier conflict, the Great War. The most high-profile intervention in the debate over Tennyson's merits in the 1940s came in 1944, when W. H. Auden published an introduction to a Phoenix House selection of the poet. At the time, Auden was one of the most famous poets in the English-speaking world, and the selection was reviewed almost as widely as Charles Tennyson's 1949 biography of the poet. From the outset, Auden's essay is deeply unconventional. He makes several biographical errors, mistaking the date of Tennyson's death as the 8<sup>th</sup> of October, 1892 (it was the 6<sup>th</sup>), and that of Tennyson's journey with Hallam to Spain as 1831 (it was 1830), and misidentifying John Wilson Croker's savage review of the poet in the *Quarterly Review* as the work of Lockhart, going on moreover to make the unsubstantiated claim that as a result of this review, 'for some years people were ashamed to be caught reading Tennyson.'<sup>681</sup> The biographical introduction ends with the following infamous passage:

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<sup>680</sup> Letter to Eric R. Dodds, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1947, quoted in Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), p. 231.

<sup>681</sup> W. H. Auden, 'Introduction' to *A Selection from the Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, p. x.

He had a large, loose-limbed body, a swarthy complexion, a high, narrow forehead, and huge bricklayer's hands; in youth he looked like a gypsy; in age like a dirty old monk; he had the finest ear, perhaps, of any English poet; he was also undoubtedly the stupidest; there was little about melancholia that he didn't know; there was little else that he did.<sup>682</sup>

Auden is not merely being outspoken for the sake of it in this passage. He combines Tennyson's own words with echoes of the later version of T. S. Eliot's essay on *In Memoriam* in order to criticise both.<sup>683</sup> Tennyson referred to one of Julia Margaret Cameron's photographs of him, taken in 1869, as 'the dirty monk',<sup>684</sup> a name which has stuck ever since; Auden's repetition of the description makes it appear that the poet always looked as he does in the portrait, but also hints at Tennyson's later quasi-religious status, voiced frequently in the 1890s and 1900s.<sup>685</sup> Auden widens T. S. Eliot's claim that Tennyson 'had the finest ear of any English poet since Milton'<sup>686</sup> by omitting Milton's name, but goes on to qualify this by immediately attributing a lack of intelligence to Tennyson in a stronger manner than any other critic, claiming that he 'was also undoubtedly the stupidest' of all the English poets. This is a recontextualising of Eliot's essay, an act which is almost as iconoclastic as what Auden is doing to Tennyson; he appears to be ridiculing Eliot's assertion of

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<sup>682</sup> Ibid.

<sup>683</sup> In a footnote, Auden included some suggested wider reading – Nicolson's book and Eliot's essay – but this is the only time Eliot is mentioned. Ibid., p. xi.

<sup>684</sup> See Ann Thwaite, *Emily Tennyson: The Poet's Wife* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), p.331.

<sup>685</sup> For example, the Duke of Argyll's poem 'At the Laureate's Funeral', *National Review* 119 (January 1893), p. 581.

<sup>686</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'In Memoriam', *Selected Essays* (London: Faber & Faber, 1999), p. 328.

Tennyson's real emotional depth as well as highlighting what he believes Eliot has left out of his essay on the poet.

One can indeed read the whole of Auden's essay as a critique of both the style and opinions of Eliot. Perhaps mimicking Eliot's discerning in Tennyson 'three qualities which are hardly found together except in the greatest poets',<sup>687</sup> Auden sets out three ways in which 'a poet may write bad poetry': he may be 'bored or in a hurry', but according to Auden, Tennyson never was; he may be 'unintentionally funny at a serious moment' by 'overlooking verbal and visual associations'; and lastly he may 'suffer from a corruption of his own consciousness and produce work the badness of which strikes the reader as intentional'.<sup>688</sup> Tennyson's verse frequently qualifies for the latter two categories in Auden's eyes. And his apparent diatribe against Tennyson continues, as he says:

If Wordsworth is the great English poet of Nature, then Tennyson is  
the great English poet of the Nursery, of

*das ungewisse Licht von Nachmittagen*  
*in denen man sich fürchtete als Kind.*

i.e. his poems deal with human emotions in their most primitive  
states, uncomplicated by conscious sexuality or intellectual

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<sup>687</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction' p. ix.

<sup>688</sup> W. H. Auden, 'Introduction' to *A Selection from the Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, p. xii.

rationalisation. (No other poetry is easier, and less illuminating, to psycho-analyse).<sup>689</sup>

Auden's rhetoric is damning even as his argument is nuanced; he uses a capital letter for 'Nursery' and denies Tennyson any 'intellectual rationalisation', in a passage dominated by untranslated German. The careless reader could conclude that this represents a lack of respect for the poet, as is clear from the critical response to the introduction.

Reviewers of the edition were quick to leap to Tennyson's defence, a reaction which is in itself an interesting counterpoint to the essay. F. O. Matthiessen, in the *New York Review of Books*, commented on the 'haphazard' nature of the introduction,<sup>690</sup> and Raymond Mortimer agreed in a *New Statesman and Nation* review, writing of Auden's 'stupidest' remark that 'if his comments appear pert, it is doubtless that he wrote them in a hurry'.<sup>691</sup> Most of the reviewers were united in seeing something of Auden in the 'Tennyson' he describes. Matthiessen noted that Auden, 'who started out to be the revolutionary Shelley of our day seems now more likely to turn out to be our nearest equivalent for Tennyson'.<sup>692</sup> Arthur Mizener went further in the *Kenyon Review*, claiming that in some of his own poems Auden was 'trying to talk about familiar subjects in something like a conventional way', something for which he had apparently

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<sup>689</sup> Ibid., p. xv. The German is from Rilke's 'Vor Dem Sommerregen', and I translate it as 'The uncertain light of afternoons in which one felt so frightened as a child'.

<sup>690</sup> F. O. Matthiessen, 'Tennyson', *New York Times Book Review* 50.4 (28<sup>th</sup> January 1945), p. 4.

<sup>691</sup> Raymond Mortimer, 'A Poet on a Poet', *New Statesman and Nation* 32.187 (28<sup>th</sup> December 1946), p. 487.

<sup>692</sup> Matthiessen, p. 4.

criticised Tennyson.<sup>693</sup> Mizener believed, however, that these attempts, in poems like 'the Yeats and Freud elegies', were founded partly on 'a deliberate willingness to accept losses in the hope of achieving something which is necessary for great poetry.'<sup>694</sup> Other critics were less forgiving; Sir Desmond MacCarthy mocked Auden's portrait of 'a poor, congenitally morbid, empty-headed arrivist who sold his early poetic gift for riches and success!'<sup>695</sup> He continued, 'how different from some poets and authors today, leaders of the young, champions of the oppressed, beacons of the future, thinkers, who, when civilisation and their fellow-countrymen were in danger, promptly left for Hollywood!'<sup>696</sup>

Auden was not entirely unhappy with the amount of debate his selection aroused. In 1947 he wrote to Eric R. Dodds that 'I became Public Cultural Enemy No 1 over the Tennyson preface [...] I'm delighted that the English can get excited over poetry though it is a little comic seeing that T is one of my favourite poets.'<sup>697</sup> Given the ostensibly hostile nature of his introduction, this seems a strange thing to say, but Tennyson had been a presence in Auden's poetry since his very first collection, and indeed if we look again at the essay on Tennyson, we can see that the poetic relationship between the two is acknowledged in a much more sustained way than the critics quoted above noted. From the 'great English poet of the Nursery' comment, Auden continues that in his 'basic anxiety about his existence Tennyson is the brother of another and greater nineteenth-

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<sup>693</sup> Arthur Mizener, 'Mr. Auden's Tennyson', *Kenyon Review* 7.2 (Spring 1945), p. 318.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid.

<sup>695</sup> Desmond MacCarthy, 'Tennyson', in *Memories* (London: MacGibbon & Lee, 1953), p. 154.

<sup>696</sup> Ibid.

<sup>697</sup> Letter to Eric R. Dodds, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1947, quoted in Richard Davenport-Hines, *Auden* (London: Heinemann, 1995), p. 231.

century poet, Baudelaire.<sup>698</sup> Ultimately, despite Auden's distaste for the poems of Tennyson which 'would teach the Ideal', he believes that he is in some respects preferable to the far more fashionable French poet, as even 'if Tennyson embarrasses us by picturing Paradise as an exact replica of Somersby Rectory or Torquay, he has at least a conception, however naïve, of a *good* place, and does not, like Baudelaire, insist that its goodness and badness are unimportant, for all that matters is its novelty, to be attained at whatever cost by a cultivation of hysteria with delight and terror.'<sup>699</sup>

The affinity between the two poets is continued as Auden suggests that 'Ulysses' is 'a glorification of the heroic dandy'.<sup>700</sup> And his essay ends with the suggestion that 'the aspects of Tennyson that are now so distasteful to us' are the 'counterpart of the "shocking" Baudelaire to whom the sole pleasure in love was the knowledge of doing evil.'<sup>701</sup> The only reason that the latter is preferred is because 'it flatters our modern forms of egoism in the same way that the former's flattered the Victorians.'<sup>702</sup> The comparison between Tennyson and progressive European artists is maintained earlier in the essay, where Auden quotes Nietzsche's description of Wagner as an artist of 'the colours of late Autumn' as applicable 'in a lesser degree' to Tennyson.<sup>703</sup> The repeated references to Baudelaire are not merely an attempt to draw an unlikely comparison between the two poets (who had a certain respect for each other).<sup>704</sup> They are also part of

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<sup>698</sup> 'Introduction' to *A Selection from the Poems of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, p. xvii.

<sup>699</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xix.

<sup>700</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>701</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xx.

<sup>702</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>703</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

<sup>704</sup> Tennyson read *Les Fleurs du Mal*, and believed Baudelaire to be "a kind of moralist", though his subjects [...] are shocking', according to William Allingham's *Diary*, quoted in *The Letters of*



Auden's attempt to confront T. S. Eliot. In *The Waste Land*, Eliot had acknowledged the influence of both Baudelaire and Wagner in his notes, while systematically excising most of the references to Tennyson and failing to acknowledge those which remained in the poem.<sup>705</sup> Auden's citation of Eliot's 1936 essay on Tennyson and his description of Baudelaire as Tennyson's 'brother' may be as much comments on Eliot as on the Victorian. Auden's essay may well be inaccurate in terms of biographical facts, but the underlying commentary on Eliot's initial reluctance to acknowledge Tennyson, and its implicit criticism of Eliot's duplicity, must have been two of his main intentions in writing it. Therefore, while it appears to be yet another intervention in the debate on Tennyson's relative merits, it is in fact evidence that the Victorian had, by 1944, become an established figure (as shown by the reactions of contemporary reviewers) and a focus for the aesthetic disagreements of more recent poets.

#### Charles Tennyson's Biography: the Influence of Freud

Just as the reviews of Auden's collection were united in their regard for Tennyson, scholarship on his work was becoming more concerned with detailed analysis as opposed to simply establishing his worthiness of a place in the canon. W. D. Paden's *Tennyson in Egypt* (1941), despite its title, is a short monograph dealing with Tennyson's juvenilia which, while not entirely convincing

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*Alfred, Lord Tennyson Volume III: 1871-1892* ed. Cecil Y. Lang and Edgar F. Shannon, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 298. Baudelaire 'asked twice for the poet [Tennyson] to receive complimentary copies of his books' according to Joanna Richardson's *Baudelaire* (London: John Murray, 1994), p. 280.

<sup>705</sup> For an example, see *Complete Poems and Plays of T. S. Eliot*, p. 76.

in its conclusions, at least treats the poet's work with some degree of psychological interest, for example:

All growing boys experience some similar time of stress. The fact is often overlooked. Since few boys write verses during the period, and fewer still publish their effusions, the purely literary record of the state is not extensive.<sup>706</sup>

Freud's ideas on psychoanalysis, by this time common currency,<sup>707</sup> also led William and Mabel DeVane to speculate on Tennyson's reasons for not marrying his fiancée until 1850. Given the depth of feeling for Hallam present in *In Memoriam*, they claim that it is likely that 'Tennyson was not psychologically free to marry Emily Sellwood, to whom he was engaged for fourteen years, until he had gathered and published *In Memoriam*.'<sup>708</sup> This is not quite as 'likely' as the DeVanes would like to claim – the reasons for his separation from her in 1840, as Robert Bernard Martin has shown, were a combination of the concern that Tennyson could not afford to marry her, Emily's sister's engagement to Tennyson's brother Charles being jeopardised by his addiction to opium, and Alfred's own fears about his future mental stability.<sup>709</sup> However, the fact that the DeVanes felt free to claim that the memory of Hallam 'interfered strangely with

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<sup>706</sup> W. D. Paden, *Tennyson in Egypt: A Study of the Imagery in His Earlier Work* (Lawrence: University of Kansas Publications, 1941), p. 59.

<sup>707</sup> In 1958, Alfred Kazin wrote that Freud's 'name is no longer the name of a man; like "Darwin", it is now synonymous with a part of nature'. 'The Freudian Revolution Analysed', *Freud and the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*, ed. Benjamin Nelson (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1958), p. 15.

<sup>708</sup> William Clyde DeVane and Mabel Phillips DeVane (eds.), *Selections from Tennyson* (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1940), p. xiii.

<sup>709</sup> See Robert Bernard Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983) pp. 246-249.

the business of living' is an important step in Tennyson criticism – tentative as it might be, it is one of the first acknowledgements of the actual effect of Hallam's death on Tennyson the man, rather than the poet.<sup>710</sup>

If one were to read W. E. Williams's 1941 introduction to a Penguin paperback edition of Tennyson's poems, it could be concluded that there was not much point in reading his poetry with Freud in mind, as Williams believed that 'Tennyson had an easy life. There was nothing in it which a biographer could call "dramatic"'. Williams continued, 'there is little enough in Tennyson's poems to suggest that he lived an eventful or a particularly interesting life: and you may well find nothing in this selection to instigate you to find out more about him.'<sup>711</sup> This is undoubtedly motivated by the audience Williams was writing for, who were still coming to terms with the concept of the Second World War, and yet it is telling that Williams recommended Hallam's *Memoir* of his father as the best place to find the facts of the poet's life; as there had been no major biographies of the poet published since 1897, the idea that Tennyson had lived a fairly dull life was widespread. However, in the 1940s it was common knowledge that the poet's grandson, Charles Tennyson, was preparing a biography of his grandfather. As we have seen, he had published a sample of the material he was collecting in the *Cornhill Magazine* in March 1936, in his article 'Tennyson's Father' in which he described the mood swings of his grandfather and the poet's unhappy childhood, makes it difficult to agree with Williams that none of Tennyson's poems are of biographical interest, although it is notable that he

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<sup>710</sup> *Selections from Tennyson*, p. xiii.

<sup>711</sup> W. E. Williams, introduction to *The Penguin Poets: Tennyson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1941), p. vii; *ibid.*, p. xi.

includes only 'Come into the garden, Maud' from 'Maud' and nine stanzas from *In Memoriam* in his collection.

Williams may have decided to omit any reference to Tennyson's upbringing from his edition of the poet's works because of his intended wartime audience, but after the war Harold Nicolson outlined the atmosphere in which the poet grew up in his Leslie Stephen Lecture of 1947 on 'Tennyson's Two Brothers', where he began with a description of the family's procession to church in 1827:

At the head of the procession stalked the rector, the Rev. George Tennyson, gaunt, sallow, enraged. The black blood which flowed in the veins of all the Tennyson had in his case turned to bile. He had been disinherited by his younger brother.<sup>712</sup>

With an obvious debt to Charles Tennyson, Nicolson went on to observe that the rector was 'for long remembered in the locality as being "amazing sharp" with his children: his brooding, angry, presence threw a shadow along the rectory walls.'<sup>713</sup> After Charles Tennyson published his full-length biography *Alfred Tennyson* in 1949 it was difficult for critics to avoid the subject of Tennyson's childhood. In an article on 'Tennyson's Religion' published in December 1949, J. C. Hardwick took pains to discuss the poet's childhood, saying that 'Somersby Rectory may not have been an ideal environment in some respects for an

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<sup>712</sup> Harold Nicolson, *Tennyson's Two Brothers* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1947), p. 5.

<sup>713</sup> *Ibid.*

adolescent boy, for the nerve strain involved by his father's queer temperament was excessive.'<sup>714</sup>

It is hard to overestimate the impact of Charles Tennyson's biography. In the introduction to his book, the author takes pains to establish it as a major intervention, claiming that it is the only work 'on a similar scale' to Hallam's *Memoir* to have been published since 1897, with Nicolson's 1923 work 'a brilliant personal interpretation', and Thomas Lounsbury's projected life of the poet unfinished.<sup>715</sup> The appeal of the 1949 biography is mainly a result of the material on Tennyson's childhood – as the author explains, Hallam Tennyson 'could not deal adequately with his father's early life, for the poet was always most unwilling to speak of it, and he had no opportunity of studying the family letters to which I have referred.'<sup>716</sup> The appeal of the book is strengthened by its treatment of Tennyson's later years with the benefit of contextual material from many of Tennyson's friends which, while present in letter form in Hallam's *Memoir*, is much more approachable in the later biography, as the accounts are not so densely packed together, or taken at face value to the same extent.

From its opening pages, Charles Tennyson's book was a revelation. He detailed the poet's father George's trip to Russia, which Charles Tennyson believed 'so strange that one wonders, can it be true;' Tennyson's later biographer Peter Levi described it as a 'romantic lie'.<sup>717</sup> George Tennyson alleged that on a trip to the coronation of the new Russian Tsar following the assassination of Emperor Paul in March 1790, he made a faux pas by alleging

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<sup>714</sup> J. C. Hardwick, 'Tennyson's Religion', *Modern Churchman* XXIX.4 (December 1949), p. 318.

<sup>715</sup> Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson* (London: Macmillan & Co., 1949), p. vii.

<sup>716</sup> *Ibid.*, p. viii.

<sup>717</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9; Peter Levi, *Tennyson* (London: Macmillan, 1993), p. 18.

that three noblemen were responsible for the assassination; two of the nobleman were present at the table and heard him. This led to a flight across southern Russia, and a spell in hiding in a cottage, where he had to wait for the trumpet of an English courier, which only came once every three months; having heard it, he eventually travelled home via Odessa. This story does not appear at all in the 1897 *Memoir*, and even if untrue, its evidence of George Tennyson's self-delusion still provides the poet with a much more interesting background than had been previously imagined. Charles Tennyson also repeated the story, from his own *Cornhill Magazine* article, of Tennyson's flight to the graveyard following one of his father's 'paroxysms of violence', which the biographer now revealed were partly caused by his 'drink habit'.<sup>718</sup>

Such new information on Tennyson was enthusiastically received. Paull F. Baum expressed gratitude for Charles Tennyson's providing 'an adequate understanding of what we kept hearing about as "the Tennysonian black blood"', and this was something of a critical consensus – his comments were echoed by Gwyn Jones, William C. DeVane, and Alfred Noyes.<sup>719</sup> Yet despite this material which reinvigorated Tennyson as a figure of interest for scholars and biographers, one scholar, Arthur Kyle Davis Jr., was not so impressed with Charles Tennyson's candour, writing:

Not only in the style but in the handling of the material there is more than a suggestion of the Victorian. The question of the importance

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<sup>718</sup> Charles Tennyson, *Alfred Tennyson*, p. 48.

<sup>719</sup> Paull F. Baum, 'Alfred Tennyson', *South Atlantic Quarterly* 49.1 (January 1950), p.96; Gwyn Jones, 'Alfred Tennyson', *Life and Letters* 63.147 (November 1949), p. 167; William C. DeVane, 'A New Life of Tennyson', *Yale Review* 39.1 (September 1949), p. 177; Alfred Noyes, 'The Real Tennyson', *Quarterly Review* 582 (October 1949), pp. 495-507.

of the sexual element in Tennyson's life, for instance, is relegated to a footnote on page 163, with this conclusion: 'I have not found any hint or rumour or heard of any tradition that at any period of his long life he gave way to sexual impulse or "took his license in the field of time."' So there the matter stands to date.<sup>720</sup>

It is strange that William C. DeVane would not react in a similar way, given his previous speculation on Tennyson's reasons for delaying his marriage.

#### Tennyson in novels, and 'Tithonus' in America

One of the clearest signals that Tennyson had secured a stable position in the English literary canon is the manner in which novelists in the late 1930s and 1940s referred to his work. In Ivy Compton-Burnett's *Elders and Betters* (1944), Anna, a manipulative young woman engineering her inheritance from an elderly aunt, cites the poet in an argument about the passing of time, noting, 'Nature is known to be red in tooth and claw [...] She snatches things from us all the time. I have found it even at my age.'<sup>721</sup> In earlier works, for instance Virginia Woolf's *To The Lighthouse*, Tennyson was the preserve of the elders and betters; in Compton-Burnett's book we can see the younger generation appropriating (admittedly well-known) phrases from Tennyson to justify behaviour which is at odds with the elder generation.

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<sup>720</sup> Arthur Kyle Davis Jr., 'Mid-Century Tennyson', *Virginia Quarterly Review* 26 (1950), p. 310.

<sup>721</sup> Ivy Compton-Burnett, *Elders and Betters* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1944), p. 52.

The most prominent poem by Tennyson which featured in novels in the period was, however, 'Tithonus'. In 1939, Aldous Huxley published a novel entitled *After Many A Summer*. It carried as its epigraph the following lines from Tennyson's poem:

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,  
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,  
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,  
And after many a summer dies the swan.<sup>722</sup>

His novel is set in California in the 1930s, and concerns an American tycoon, Jo Stoyte, who is loosely modelled on W. Randolph Hearst, the original of Orson Welles's *Citizen Kane*. Stoyte lives in a vast mansion with his young lover, Virginia Maunciple. His doctor, Dr. Obispo, is investigating a way of using fish guts to preserve the ageing tycoon's life, aided by his assistant, Spanish Civil War veteran Pete Boone. Into this strange environment enters Jeremy Pordage, a middle-aged English academic, who has been contracted to sort through the papers of the English aristocratic Hauberk family which Stoyte has recently bought.

While the story begins with a grotesque Californian landscape seen through the eyes of Pordage, Stoyte is the most important character of the novel, at least in terms of its title and the thrust of the plot. At the end of the novel, rightly believing his younger lover to be having an affair with Dr. Obispo, he goes

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<sup>722</sup> 'Tithonus' lines 1-4, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1114. Epigraph to Aldous Huxley, *After Many a Summer* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1939).



into a murderous rage, and ends up killing Pete, the doctor's assistant, rather than the doctor himself. Forced to flee, Stoyte ends up in London and goes to the ancestral home of the Hauberk family. In the basement, he discovers the other 'Tithonus' figure of the novel, the Fifth Earl of Gonister, aged 201, who has survived (along with his housekeeper) thanks to a diet of fish guts which he detailed in the Hauberk papers. The Earl is, however far from the eloquent, contemplative state of mind presented in Tennyson's poem. As Obispo says, he is 'A foetal ape that's had time to grow up'.<sup>723</sup> Stoyte, in a state of shock, can only mutter that 'they look like they were having a pretty good time. I mean in their own way, of course.'<sup>724</sup>

The Californian attitude to death is the dominant theme of Huxley's novel. One of Stoyte's proudest possessions is the 'Beverley Pantheon', its grounds loosely modelled on the real-life Forest Lawn cemetery in California. Through the eyes of Pordage, we see 'The sloping lawns, like a green oasis in the mountain desolation', which features 'the tiny Church of the Poet' – a miniature reproduction of Holy Trinity at Stratford-on-Avon complete with Shakespeare's tomb and a twenty-four-hour service of organ music played automatically by the Perpetual Wurlitzer.'<sup>725</sup> We read that the Pantheon itself 'lacked all verisimilitude', and inside it Pordage finds, among other items, a replica of Rodin's 'Le Baiser', 'illuminated by concealed pink floodlights', and at the entrance to every room there is a marble scroll inscribed with the motto 'Oh, Death, where is thy

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<sup>723</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>724</sup> Ibid., p. 314.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid., p. 12.

sting?’<sup>726</sup> This is not too far from the truth of Forest Lawn; as Jessica Mitford observed in 1963, the burial areas at the cemetery have been given names like ‘Whispering Pines’, ‘Everlasting Love’ and ‘Babyland’, which has an ‘encircling heart-shaped motor road’.<sup>727</sup>

Evelyn Waugh visited Forest Lawn several times in early 1947, and reported on the ‘entirely unique’ cemetery in his essay ‘Half in Love with Easeful Death’ which was published in *Life* and *The Tablet*. His comments chime with Huxley’s earlier parody: ‘Forest Lawn has consciously turned its back on the “old customs of death”, the grim traditional alternatives of Heaven and Hell, and promises immediate eternal happiness for all its inmates’; this is very close to the motto ‘Oh, Death, where is thy sting?’, inscribed on the marble scrolls in Huxley’s Beverley Pantheon.<sup>728</sup> Waugh noted that at the real Forest Lawn, ‘There is no room for the Negro or the Chinaman, however devout; avowed atheists are welcome, but notorious ill-doers are not’,<sup>729</sup> which led him to foresee ‘the huge joke of what the professors of anthropology will make of it all’ in the future.<sup>730</sup> The novelist evidently relished the opportunity of visiting, and boasted in a letter that he was ‘on easy terms with the chief embalmer & next week am to lunch with Dr. HUBERT EATON himself.’<sup>731</sup> And in his essay Waugh describes one of the three non-sectarian churches, ‘The Little Church of the Flowers’, which is a replica of Stoke Poges Church in Buckinghamshire, where Gray wrote his ‘Elegy written in

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<sup>726</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

<sup>727</sup> Jessica Mitford, *The American Way of Death* (London: Hutchinson, 1963), p. 128.

<sup>728</sup> Evelyn Waugh, ‘Half in Love with Easeful Death: an Examination of Californian Burial Customs’, *The Essays, Articles and Reviews of Evelyn Waugh* ed. Donat Gallagher (London: Methuen, 1983), p. 336.

<sup>729</sup> Ibid.

<sup>730</sup> Ibid., p. 337.

<sup>731</sup> Letter to Augustus Peters, 6 March 1947, *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, ed. Mark Amory (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1980), p. 247. Eaton was the founder of Forest Lawn.

a Country Churchyard'. This recalls Huxley's earlier satirical rendering of the cemetery in *After Many a Summer*, where he describes 'the tiny Church of the Poet.'<sup>732</sup>

The association between Forest Lawn – the American way of death – and poetry has its roots in real life, and Huxley and Waugh took it as the inspiration for their two novels, both of which are directly concerned with one particular poem – 'Tithonus'. James J. Lynch has argued that the two novels take the poem as narrative inspiration – for Lynch, Jo Stotye is simply an updated Tithonus with a lack of wisdom, whose life story mimics that of Tennyson's version of Tithonus to the extent that he 'immures himself in a castle on the western limit of the American continent.'<sup>733</sup> That Tennyson's poem and its juxtaposition with Forest Lawn are the inspiration for the story is undoubted, and yet the poem is not alluded to in the rest of the novel.

The association between the Californian death industry and 'Tithonus' was sufficiently great, however, for Evelyn Waugh to return to the subject in *The Loved One*, a short novel published in 1948. He was aware of Huxley's earlier novel – in a letter he wrote that 'Aldous flirted with [Forest Lawn] in *After Many a Summer* but only with the superficialities. I am at the heart of it.'<sup>734</sup> And being at the heart of it also led to a more sustained engagement with poetry. Waugh's version of the cemetery, 'Whispering Glades', includes a burial plot, only accessible by boat, called 'the Lake Island of Innisfree', which is, according to the

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<sup>732</sup> *After Many A Summer*, p. 12.

<sup>733</sup> James L. Lynch, 'Tennyson's "Tithonus", Huxley's *After Many a Summer* and Waugh's *The Loved One*', *South Atlantic Review* 51.4 (November 1986), p. 33.

<sup>734</sup> Letter to Augustus Peters, 6 March 1947, *The Letters of Evelyn Waugh*, p. 247.

boatman, 'named after a very fancy poem.'<sup>735</sup> The 'bee-loud glade' which Yeats described in his poem is replicated by beehives at Whispering Glades, although since 'folks was always getting stung' by the bees, the natural sound of the insects was replaced by 'mechanical and scientific' effects.<sup>736</sup>

The island is visited by Dennis Barlow, an Englishman who has shown some poetic talents prior to the Second World War (his one volume was reviewed in two columns of the *Sunday Times*).<sup>737</sup> Barlow travels to Hollywood after the war to write the script for a film of Shelley's life but ends up with a job at 'The Happier Hunting Ground', a pet mortuary and cemetery. This is a job that his fellow Englishmen in Hollywood believe 'an Englishman just doesn't take', but Barlow is happy.<sup>738</sup> When he returns to his workplace after dinner, he sits down to read poetry.

Life in the Air Force had converted him from an amateur to a mere addict. There were certain trite passages of poetry which from a diverse multitude of associations never failed to yield the sensations he craved; he never experimented; these were the branded drug, the sure specific, big magic. He opened the anthology as a woman opens her familiar pack of cigarettes.

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<sup>735</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *The Loved One* (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1948), p. 82. Yeats's title is 'Lake Isle', a deliberate alteration by Waugh to highlight the Californian lack of poetic appreciation.

<sup>736</sup> W. B. Yeats, 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree', line 4, *The Collected Poems of W. B. Yeats* ed. Richard J. Finneran (London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 39; *The Loved One*, p. 82.

<sup>737</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>738</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

Outside the windows the cars swept past continuously, out of town, into town, lights ablaze, radios at full throttle.<sup>739</sup>

The poem he turns to is 'Tithonus':

*"I wither slowly in thine arms,"* he read. *"Here at the quiet limit of the world,"* and repeated to himself: "Here at the quiet limit of the world. Here at the quiet limit of the world"... as a monk will repeat a single pregnant text, over and over again in prayer.

Presently the telephone rang.<sup>740</sup>

The Tennysonian phrase recurs to him later as he reflects on his 'worthy trade':

Mr. Schultz raised his wages. The scars of adolescence healed.  
There at the quiet limit of the world he experienced a tranquil joy  
such as he had known only once before, one glorious early  
Eastertide when, honourably lamed in a house-match, he had lain  
in bed and heard below the sanatorium windows the school  
marching out for a field-day.<sup>741</sup>

Barlow equates Tennyson's poem with solitude and rest. While it is clearly concerned with the former, the only idea of rest that can be found therein is as an

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<sup>739</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>740</sup> Ibid.

<sup>741</sup> Ibid., p. 24.

idealised, unattainable death to which the immortal, yet ageing speaker aspires. Barlow's dwelling on the phrase and his belief in its relevance to his own situation are both part of a wilful misreading. His position at the limit of the Western world is unquestioned, but it is far from 'quiet', with the rushing of the cars and the blaring of their radios, and his reverie is broken by more noise, the telephone ringing. The actual sensation he derives from the poem is an indulgent schoolboy laziness – which he is exhibiting in opening the anthology 'as a woman opens her familiar pack of cigarettes'.<sup>742</sup>

This approach to poetry is maintained in his love affair with the corpse beautician, Aimée Thanatagenos, whom he meets while at the Lake Island of Innisfree. He tells her he is writing a poem, and quotes part of Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale' to her (these lines include 'half in love with easeful death', which Waugh used as the title from his article on Forest Lawn).<sup>743</sup> He never admits that it is not his own work, and on discovering that she prefers the 'earlier masters' to his own modern verse, he begins to copy out poems from 'the bran-tub of the anthologies' and claim them as his own.<sup>744</sup>

Once he came near to ruin when she remarked that "Shall I  
compare thee to a summer's day" reminded her of something she  
had learned at school [...]. "Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the

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<sup>742</sup> Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>743</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>744</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

white", had struck bang in the centre of the bull, but he knew few poems so high and rich and voluptuous.<sup>745</sup>

'Bang in the centre of the bull' is at odds with the tone of Tennyson's poem, and highlights Barlow's instrumental approach to poetry, which he uses as a seduction device to win the heart – or perhaps the body – of Aimée. When he is eventually found out, and their engagement is broken off, he reasons with her that 'in the dying world I come from quotation is a national vice. [...] It used to be the classics, now it's lyric verse.'<sup>746</sup> This reference to the poetic theories which T. S. Eliot had expounded in the late 1910s and early 1920s is evidence not only of Eliot's influence over English poetry in the 1930s and 1940s, but also of Barlow's deceitfulness. The manner in which he apparently puts Eliot's theories into practice shows that he is being selective about attitudes to poetry in the 'dying world I come from'. What he is doing is not 'allusion' in the manner of Eliot, but outright plagiarism.<sup>747</sup> Even his attempts at writing a poetic tribute to his friend Sir Francis Hinsley, who hangs himself after being fired by Megalo Studios, are sarcastic rewritings of anthology pieces. Witness his adaptation of Tennyson's 'Ode on the death of the Duke of Wellington':

*Bury the great Knight*

*With the studio's valediction*

*Let us bury the great Knight*

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<sup>745</sup> Ibid., pp. 105-6.

<sup>746</sup> Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>747</sup> One is reminded of the distinction made by Christopher Ricks in *Allusion to the Poets*.

*Who was once the arbiter of popular fiction.*<sup>748</sup>

The cruelty of Barlow's version of Tennyson's ode lies not just in his decision to write a lazy parody in honour of his dead housemate, but also in the disparity between the two deaths – Wellington's funeral happened 'to the noise of the mourning of a mighty nation', but Sir Francis has killed himself in part as a result of the isolation he felt as an unemployed Englishman in Hollywood, where he is largely unlamented, even by the man he lived with.<sup>749</sup> His acquaintances at the cricket club believe that the suicide was a 'ghastly business', which happened mainly as a result of the shame of cohabiting with the failed poet and proud pet mortician, Barlow. Both Wellington and Hinsley had been given titles by the English crown, but while the death of the former was treated with all the pomp and ceremony the British Empire could muster (as indeed was that of Tennyson), the latter died friendless and alone in California, which Barlow envisages as a place of tranquillity, 'the quiet limit of the world'.

Although he is a young Englishman who has tried to adapt to the Californian way of life (and death), Barlow is very much an anti-hero. His approach to seducing the naïve Aimée is brutally free from ideals:

Dennis required salesmanship; he sought to present Aimée with an irresistible picture not so much of her own merits or even of his, as

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<sup>748</sup> *The Loved One*, p. 69.

<sup>749</sup> 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington' line 4, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 1007.



of the enormous gratification he was offering. The films did it; the crooners did it; but not, it seemed, the English poets.<sup>750</sup>

The English poets can only offer him poetry replete with qualifications, thanks to the sophistication of their verse. Ultimately he is undone in his quest for Aimée as a result of his deceitful approach to quotation, as well as the difference between American and British conceptions of courtship. She complains in a letter to a newspaper agony aunt that Barlow is ‘not at all cultured. At first I thought he must be being a poet and he has been to Europe and seen the Art there but many of our greatest authors seem to mean nothing to him.’<sup>751</sup> There appears to be a disjunction between American and British ideas of art – Aimée may have studied ‘Art’ at college, but it was a subsidiary subject to ‘Beauticraft’, and Waugh’s use of a capital ‘A’ here is interesting – one is reminded of Jeremy Pordage’s distaste for an American professor in *After Many a Summer*, as he talks ‘in phrases full of the audible equivalents of Capital Letters’.<sup>752</sup> Such an education means that Aimée is unable to identify the poems Dennis is sending her as the fruits of many different poetic imaginations, and his ‘fraud’ is only uncovered when he adapts ‘Helena’, which is by an American poet, Edgar Allen Poe, and which is identified by his rival for Aimée’s affections, Mr. Joyboy. The attitude to art, and poetry in particular, of the Californian Aimée is a mixture of naïveté and materialism. When Dennis first meets her, she claims that at the Lake Island she thinks about ‘Death and Art’, and this inspires him to recite lines from ‘Ode to a Nightingale’:

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<sup>750</sup> *The Loved One*, p. 106.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>752</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91; *After Many a Summer*, p. 69.

...For many a time  
I have been half in love with easeful death,  
Call'd him soft names in many a mused rhyme,  
To take into the air my quiet breath;  
Now more than ever seems it rich to die,  
To cease upon the midnight with no pain...

Aimée appreciates these lines:

Why it's beautiful. It's just what I've thought so often and haven't been able to express. 'To make it rich to die' and 'to cease upon the midnight *with no pain*.' That's exactly what Whispering Glades exists for, isn't it? I think it's wonderful to be able to write like that.<sup>753</sup>

Her interpretation is overly literal and exhibits no sense of the history of the language, the reading of 'rich' having more to do with material riches than emotions, and she also fails to see the poem as an expression of longing, reading it almost as an advertisement for Whispering Glades. But despite this, she is genuinely moved by the poetry Barlow passes off as his own, and takes death seriously – as shown by her final act, which is to kill herself. Despite this bleak ending, there is some hope for poetry, the two nations, and indeed mankind, in the implications of the novel. T. S. Eliot, the man whose ideas Barlow

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<sup>753</sup> *The Loved One*, p. 96.

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cites to justify his lies to Aimée, was American, and she enjoys the poetry Barlow copies for her despite her overly literal interpretation of many of the verses – and the most successful poem he claims as his own is by Tennyson.

Poetry also breaks down the distinction between California and England in *After Many a Summer*. Dr. Obispo says that Pete's infatuation with Virginia is based on the fact that he 'Thinks she's like something in the Works of Tennyson. You know, chemically pure'.<sup>754</sup> While there is no doubt that the hypocritical Virginia is far from pure (she draws a curtain over her Virgin Mary when sleeping with Obispo), her name, and general demeanour, do imply purity. The fact that the doctor characterises this as 'Tennysonian' shows that the poet's work bridges any Anglo-American divide, in two novels which are ultimately concerned with the failure of both American optimism and English cynicism in their conception of mortality.

Evelyn Waugh's most famous book of the 1940s, *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), also shows a conciliatory attitude to Tennyson. The first part of the novel concerns the arrival at Oxford of Charles Ryder, who is warned by his cousin Jasper not to fall in with the 'undesirables of the college'.<sup>755</sup> Ryder, narrating with hindsight, is scornful of the 'commonplace' books he brought up to college with him, for example 'Roger Fry's *Vision and Design*, the Medici Press edition of *A Shropshire Lad*, *Eminent Victorians*'.<sup>756</sup> Despite his cousin's warnings, Ryder falls in with Sebastian Flyte, one of a group of upper-class students seen by his

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<sup>754</sup> *After Many a Summer*, pp. 60-61.

<sup>755</sup> Evelyn Waugh, *Brideshead Revisited* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1945), p. 25.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 26.

cousin Jasper as '*the very worst set in the University*'.<sup>757</sup> One of these is Anthony Blanche, who after eating lunch with Flyte, Ryder and several others, in Flyte's rooms, proceeds to the balcony and recites parts of *The Waste Land* out to 'the sweated and muffled throng' walking to the Summer Eights regatta through Christ Church Meadow.<sup>758</sup> This is in keeping with the mid-1920s setting of the novel, but more surprising is that immediately after this recital, another of the lunch party sings 'Home they brought her warrior dead', 'to his own accompaniment on the harmonium'.<sup>759</sup> The juxtaposition of Victorian and Modernist carries on from the earlier *A Handful of Dust*, but there is a difference – while the 1934 novel was set in the present day, the beginning of *Brideshead Revisited* takes place in the past. The students' seeing no problem in singing Tennyson after a recital of Eliot could be interpreted as a signal that the radical break in tradition identified by Pound and Eliot in their early criticism is not quite as revolutionary in hindsight, with young readers in the 1920s equally capable of appreciating the work of Victorians and Modernists.

As the title suggests, *Brideshead Revisited* is about revisiting and the act of memory. The youthful enthusiasm of Ryder's time at Oxford is presented with nostalgia and regret, and this only increases when Ryder recalls the beginning of his second year.:

Everywhere, on cobble and gravel and lawn, the leaves were falling  
and in the college gardens the smoke of the bonfires joined the wet

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<sup>757</sup> Ibid., p. 38. Italics Waugh's own.

<sup>758</sup> Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>759</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

river mist, drifting across the grey walls; the flags were oily  
underfoot and as, one by one, the lamps were lit in the windows  
round the quad, the golden lights were diffuse and remote, new  
figures in new gowns wandered through the twilight under the  
arches and the familiar bells now spoke of a year's memories.<sup>760</sup>

Even in the description of the beginning of a year which he and Sebastian were  
to spend mainly in the company of one another, Ryder's presentation of the  
scene is melancholic and calls to mind in several of its phrases the following from  
*In Memoriam*:

By night we lingered on the lawn,  
For underfoot the herb was dry;  
And genial warmth; and o'er the sky  
The silvery haze of summer drawn;  
  
And calm that let the tapers burn  
Unwavering: not a cricket chirred:  
The brook alone far-off was heard,  
And on the board the fluttering urn [...].<sup>761</sup>

Waugh's passage transports Tennyson's scene of a summer evening to Oxford  
in the autumn night, and the poetic inspiration is clear if we think of later lines

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<sup>760</sup> Ibid., p. 93.

<sup>761</sup> *In Memoriam* XCV lines 1-8, *The Poems of Tennyson* p. 945.

from the same part of *In Memoriam*, where 'in the house light after light / Went out, and I was left alone.'<sup>762</sup> Both *In Memoriam* and *Brideshead Revisited* are elegies for a lost youthful friendship, formed in either Cambridge or Oxford, with both narrators ultimately 'left alone' and removed from the close bonds of young companionship. On leaving Oxford, Charles Ryder eventually becomes an architectural artist, selling books of 'portraits of houses that were soon to be deserted or debased.'<sup>763</sup> National heritage in the face of potential permanent destruction is of great importance in the book, and Tennyson is part of this heritage – Waugh explicitly links his elegiac account of youthful companionship to the earlier *In Memoriam*. By the late 1940s, Tennyson is unmistakably a part of English national history, and the reaction against him had finally relented.

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<sup>762</sup> Ibid., lines 19-20, p. 946.

<sup>763</sup> *Brideshead Revisited*, p. 199.

## Conclusion

What we are trying desperately to be unlike can tell a great deal about not only what we are doing but why, and a movement may often be better understood by what it concretely opposes than by its theoretical slogans.<sup>764</sup>

Bate's claim seems then an accurate observation about the Modernist movement, whose first murmurings can be perceived in the character of Lucy Honeychurch in *A Room with a View*, who has 'grown degenerate' from the Victorian image of the idealised medieval lady to whom she was 'bidden to lift her eyes when feeling serious.'<sup>765</sup> This shift of sensibility manifested itself in criticism of Tennyson which tended to develop a more concerted anti-Victorian (and anti-Tennysonian) viewpoint from the late 1900s onwards. The writers who contributed to the *Egoist* in the 1910s developed this falling-away from the High Victorian ideal which had still flourished in the 1890s, into a more virulent dislike, in which Tennyson stood as the most characteristic of all Victorian writers. As Ezra Pound noted, in an act of feigned magnanimity, the reader of the *Egoist* was most likely 'tired of hearing depreciation of Tennyson', but this did not stop him from immediately agreeing that 'he is a very convenient example.'<sup>766</sup> Hostility towards Tennyson was echoed in both the poetry and criticism of T. S. Eliot and

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<sup>764</sup> *The Burden of the Past*, p. 21.

<sup>765</sup> E. M. Forster, *A Room with a View*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>766</sup> Ezra Pound, 'Laudor', *Selected Prose 1909-1965* ed. William Cookson (New York: New Directions, 1973), p. 384.

also in the fiction of James Joyce, whose fictional alter-ego is beaten by less forward-thinking classmates for preferring Byron.

The influence of this avant-garde is clearly discernible in the scarcity of full-length monographs published on the poet from 1920 to 1940. The authors who did publish studies of the poet were often far from complimentary, for example the fervently anti-Victorian Hugh l'Anson Fausset and the more measured, but far from enthusiastic Harold Nicolson. The expression of hostility to Tennyson, who by this stage was clearly linked by writers like Fausset and Virginia Woolf to the horrors of the Great War, was by the early 1930s virtually a prerequisite for any aspiring English writer, the most notable poetical allusions to his work in the early 1930s being parodic revisions of his work for radical political ends. Some novelists of the 1930s followed suit, with the laziness and inertia of Faulkner's Gail Hightower apparently reflected by his taste for the poet's work, but other fiction writers in the period were more balanced in their approaches, with his work playing a central role in the juxtaposition of Victorian and Modern in Waugh's *A Handful of Dust*, and deeply affecting the protagonist of Greene's *A Gun For Sale*. The poet looked set for rehabilitation, a process accelerated by the outbreak of the Second World War, which cast disagreements over the merits of differing aesthetics into stark relief. Tennyson was assimilated into the idea of 'Englishness' in the broadcasts of poets as diverse as John Betjeman, T. S. Eliot and (in rather less sympathetic fashion) Ezra Pound. After the war, the poet received a comprehensive biography by his grandson which removed any lingering suspicions that his life had been 'without adventure, almost without



incident',<sup>767</sup> and the critical furore over W. H. Auden's introduction to his work (itself far more complimentary than it initially seems) is evidence that a body of poetry reviewers and enthusiasts felt that any apparent prejudice against the poet (at least when voiced by Auden) should be opposed. The presence of 'Tithonus' in two novels satirizing the American way of death is evidence that Tennyson had become part of the English canon (if this status was ever in doubt), and the letters of young British writers beginning their careers in the 1940s are evidence of the rapid change engendered by the war.

The young Philip Larkin and Kingsley Amis met at St John's College, Oxford, in 1941; both were reading English. Although the war saw Amis leave university to serve in the army (Larkin was spared from service because of his poor eyesight), the two remained close after the end of the conflict and kept up a steady correspondence which has since become an integral part of their literary fame. Although Amis later, editing a selection of Tennyson's verse, discerned a 'massive prejudice' against Tennyson in the first half of the twentieth century,<sup>768</sup> nonetheless he parodied Tennyson in a 1947 letter to Larkin:

Send me your reactions to the enclosed a.s.a.p. Larkin,

The red rose cries, 'Helluh-er, helluh-er;'

And the white rose weeps, 'Chwist nuh-er;'

The larkspur listens, 'Good shuh-er, good shuh-er;'

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<sup>767</sup> Andrew Lang, 'Alfred Lord Tennyson', *Longman's Magazine* 31 (November 1897), p. 28.

<sup>768</sup> Kingsley Amis, 'Introduction' to *Tennyson* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 7.

And the lily whispers, 'Feark yah-er,'<sup>769</sup>

Such foul-mouthed comic verse is a regular occurrence in Amis's letters to Larkin. However, he parodied Tennyson in 1952 with an at least partly serious aim, when discussing John Wain's terza-rima poetry:

I think the metre makes for long-windedness or chattiness or something. I mean to say, they just go on and on, what? He doesn't say anything you couldn't say in half the time, does he? I can imagine some Dryden of 1980 writing that the sweetness of English verse was never understood or practised by his forefathers, and that Mr. Empson and Mr. Wain were the first reformers of English numbers. It is the English lecturer, And he is grown so poor, so poor. The lectures and tutorials have lost their meaning. And this is what breaks the heart.<sup>770</sup>

Lines 169-170 of 'The Miller's Daughter' by Tennyson run 'It is the Miller's daughter, / And she is grown so dear, so dear.'<sup>771</sup> The reference to Tennyson highlights the ignorance of any potential future 'Dryden' who might claim Wain's

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<sup>769</sup> To Philip Larkin, 17 September 1947, *The Letters of Kingsley Amis* ed. Zachary Leader (London: HarperCollins, 2000), p. 141. In a letter of the 15<sup>th</sup> July 1946, Amis told Larkin 'It is a lovely day and I have been sitting in the garden reading other men's words', including those of Tennyson (*ibid.*, p. 78). The sentiment is reminiscent of Wilfred Owen's account of reading Tennyson in the garden of Dunsden Vicarage.

<sup>770</sup> To Philip Larkin, 18 June 1952, *ibid.*, p. 286.

<sup>771</sup> 'The Miller's Daughter' lines 169-170, *The Poems of Tennyson*, p. 379.

interest in rhyme as a new phenomenon.<sup>772</sup> The 'poorness' of the poetry – and indeed the teaching – of the English lecturers John Wain and William Empson is also suggested. And though there are few definite allusions to Tennyson in Larkin and Amis's poetry and fiction, it is clear that by the 1950s the reaction against the Victorians had calmed.

This movement away from outright hostility towards Tennyson and the Victorians in general was mirrored in the academic world. In the 1940s, the study of the Victorian novel was becoming a serious academic discipline. *The Trollopian*, a journal founded in 1945, was designed originally to study Trollope's novels as 'the readiest materials for the reconstruction of Victorian life', viewing the mid-nineteenth century as 'a chapter in the textbook of English history'.<sup>773</sup> The editor, Bradford A. Booth, believed that 'time silences disputes and wears away prejudices'.<sup>774</sup> Such was the popularity of the journal that its initial issue was reprinted the following year, along with the second issue in which Booth acknowledged that '*The Trollopian* has always been conceived as a journal of the history of Victorian fiction'.<sup>775</sup> This was formally acknowledged in the changing of the journal's title in 1949, to *Nineteenth-Century Fiction*.<sup>776</sup> This increase in scholarship of the Victorian period can be discerned in a growth of Tennyson criticism. After the publication of Charles Tennyson's biography of his grandfather, articles and books about the poet became less concerned with debating whether he warranted a place in the English canon, and focused more

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<sup>772</sup> Dryden's idea of his predecessors overlooking rhyme is a chief concern in Walter Jackson Bate's book.

<sup>773</sup> Bradford A. Booth, 'Preface', *The Trollopian* 1 (Summer 1945), p. 1.

<sup>774</sup> Ibid.

<sup>775</sup> Bradford A. Booth, 'Editorial Note', *The Trollopian* 2 (March 1946), p. 1.

<sup>776</sup> Since 1986 this journal has been called *Nineteenth-Century Literature*.

on academic scholarship and study of his poetry. In 1960, Jerome Buckley's *Tennyson: The Growth of a Poet*, was published, a reappraisal of many of the poems most hotly contested in the previous seventy years.

As my database of poetry published in the period shows, Tennyson never lost his appeal to general readers (at least in the eyes of editors), and allusions to his work endure in the work of novelists after 1950, not least in that of Agatha Christie. Her most Tennysonian book is *The Mirror Crack'd From Side to Side* (1962), a Miss Marple novel whose title is a direct quotation from 'The Lady of Shalott' and whose epigraph contains four lines from the poem:

*Out flew the web and floated wide;*

*The mirror crack'd from side to side;*

*"The curse is come upon me," cried*

*The Lady of Shalott.*<sup>777</sup>

In the novel, a young woman, Heather Badcock, is poisoned after talking to her idol, the film star Marina Gregg. At the meeting Gregg's face is a picture of horror, which is described haltingly by Mrs. Bantry, a witness, thus:

As though she's seen something that – oh dear me, how hard is it to describe things. Do you remember the Lady of Shalott? *The mirror crack'd from side to side: 'The doom has come upon me,' cried the Lady of Shalott.* Well, that's what she looked like. People

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<sup>777</sup> Epigraph to Agatha Christie, *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side* (London: The Crime Club, 1962).

laugh at Tennyson nowadays, but the Lady of Shalott always thrilled me when I was young and it still does.<sup>778</sup>

The words 'doom' and 'curse' remain interchangeable in the phrase, which is quoted repeatedly by Mrs. Bantry and by the other characters in the book (in an effort to work out exactly what would cause such a look to come over Gregg's face). The resolution is a human one – it is the second time the actress and her admirer had met, the first being when Badcock was ill with German measles and disguised it so as to be able to meet Gregg. At this point Gregg was in the early stages of pregnancy and contracted the illness, with the result that her baby was born mentally disabled. She had no idea that the disease was contracted from Badcock until their second meeting, after which she poisoned her admirer in an act of revenge. The ending is a sad one as Gregg also dies of poisoning, making it apparent who Badcock's killer actually was, and on the final pages 'Marina Gregg lay in the great white shell of the bed – her eyes closed, her hands folded.'<sup>779</sup> At the image Marple thinks 'So [...] might the Lady of Shalott have lain in the boat that carried her down from Camelot.'<sup>780</sup> And as Gregg's husband falteringly says 'She was – so lovely – and she had suffered so much', Marple 'quoted softly the last lines of the poem:

*He said: "She has a lovely face;  
God in His mercy lend her grace,*

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<sup>778</sup> Ibid., p. 67.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid., p. 255.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid., p. 256.

*The Lady of Shalott.*<sup>781</sup>

The prominence of Tennyson in the work of so popular an author (she had already been made a CBE, in 1956) indicates a revival of interest. Such a revival was also shown by an exhibition held at the Usher Gallery in Lincoln in 1963 of what it had recently acquired from the Tennyson Estate – its ‘Tennyson Collection’, which remains there (albeit mostly in storage) to this day. A great deal of material from the collection was on display in the 1963 exhibition including personal artefacts, such as the clinical thermometer used during the last days of his life, several family portraits, and some manuscript material, including one of the ledgers in which he wrote *In Memoriam*. Following the popularity of this exhibition, just as the *Trollopian* emerged in the 1940s, almost twenty years later Tennyson criticism had a journal, as the first issue of the *Tennyson Research Bulletin* was published in 1967.<sup>782</sup> But the most major intervention in Tennyson studies of the decade came at the very end of the 1960s, when Christopher Ricks published his masterly critical edition of *The Poems of Tennyson*, which is still reliable and has only been surpassed by Ricks’s own revised three-volume edition, published in 1987.

Ricks’s 1969 edition was indispensable to scholars of the poet, and it was followed in 1972 by another important book by the same author, entitled *Tennyson*. In this study, Ricks claims that he is trying to ‘create a sense of what Tennyson in his private life underwent and became; to make an independent

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<sup>781</sup> Ibid.

<sup>782</sup> 1972 saw the founding of an esoteric, coterie journal entitled *The Enchanted Moan*, devoted to ‘Maud’, of whose issues only six copies were ever printed, with anonymously-written articles, but copies of which remain in the British Library.

exploration of his poetry, seeking to comprehend its special distinction and to establish distinctions; and to suggest some of the relationship between the life and work.<sup>783</sup> The book is not a straightforward biography, and yet the links drawn by Ricks between the life and the work are some of the most sensitive and nuanced pieces of Tennyson criticism ever written, not least thanks to Ricks's willingness to examine the poet's troubled childhood in greater depth than any critic before him. But Ricks, by this point one of the world authorities on the poet thanks to his 1969 edition, does not withhold criticism when he believes it is due. He writes that the *Idylls* are 'strikingly uneven', and that 'the staple of the verse is insensitive and awkward.'<sup>784</sup> Even this is part of the book's central argument, similar to that of T. S. Eliot's 1936 essay; that Tennyson is a poet of doubt.

A year prior to Ricks's book on Tennyson being published, Alan Sinfield produced a shorter work, *The Language of Tennyson's In Memoriam*, focusing exclusively on the elegy, and placing Tennyson in a tradition of poets concerned with the English language which included Eliot and Pope. Although to this day it is not often acknowledged in teaching of Eliot at schools or on undergraduate University courses, the link between him and Tennyson was firmly established by the monographs of Sinfield and Ricks, two greatly differing critics. The very end of the 1970s saw the publication of another book which owes a debt to Eliot, and which is still the standard biography of Tennyson, Robert Bernard Martin's *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart*, in which the author expresses gratitude for there no longer being a 'need to justify a study' of Tennyson.<sup>785</sup>

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<sup>783</sup> Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), p. vii.

<sup>784</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 264; *ibid.*, p. 269.

<sup>785</sup> Robert Bernard Martin, *Tennyson: The Unquiet Heart* (London: Faber & Faber, 1980), p. vii.

The works of criticism which viewed the poet in the harshest light in the first half of the twentieth century usually did so thanks to an inbuilt, and often unspoken, prejudice against the Victorian age in general. In contrast the most strident pieces of writing on the poet from the 1970s and 1980s were almost always open in the disclosure of the reasons behind their approach. Alan Sinfield, influenced by Marxist theory and one of the first practitioners of Cultural Materialism, published an engaging, polemical work on the poet in 1986, in which he was openly hostile to 'politically regressive' critics of the poet such as Christopher Ricks and Jerome Buckley, preferring to re-situate Tennyson's poetry in the historical, political, and social context of the period in which it was first published.<sup>786</sup> Gender theory also made an impact on Tennyson criticism – in her 1988 biography of the poet, Marion Shaw acknowledged that 'no English poet has written more about women than Tennyson', but ultimately found Tennyson a 'misogynist poet', whose separation of women into 'good and bad' was increasingly influenced by his sense of the 'dangerousness' of those he considered 'bad'.<sup>787</sup> The school of Queer Theory also found much to say about the poet's work, with Christopher Craft's 1994 book *Another Kind of Love* considering the implications of same-sex desire in *In Memoriam*, a poem which he feels 'keeps its desire by keeping its desire desiring'.<sup>788</sup> The 1980s also saw the publication of Ricks's definitive three-volume edition of Tennyson's poetry, as well as a three-volume edition of the poet's collected letters, edited by Edgar F. Shannon and Cecil Y. Lang.

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<sup>786</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Alfred Tennyson* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), p. 9.

<sup>787</sup> Marion Shaw, *Alfred Lord Tennyson* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1988), p. 101; *ibid.*, p. 141; *ibid.*, p. 106.

<sup>788</sup> Christopher Craft, *Another Kind of Love* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), p. 70.



One of the most interesting ways to map the changes in Tennyson's renown can be found in the reaction of the *Times Literary Supplement* to his death. While the centenary of the poet's birth in 1909 occasioned Walter de la Mare to write of the 'new generation of poets being 'little influenced by, if not actually antagonistic to, the ideals of the Victorian age.'<sup>789</sup>, the fiftieth anniversary of his death in 1942 saw widespread praise for the 'Great National Poet' (the change in viewpoint owing a lot to the situation in the Second World War), and in 1992 the same periodical occasioned a series of names from the world of literature to 'reflect on Tennyson's achievement and influence' in a piece entitled 'A hundred years after'.<sup>790</sup> Many of the contributors write of their early years in which a prejudice against the poet was a prerequisite – Andrew Motion describing his first encounter with the poet's work at university, where 'All I could hear were the taunts of Joyce and Auden: Lord Tennyson was Lawn Tennyson; he had a nearly perfect ear but he was stupid', and Kingsley Amis writing that when he was first exposed to the poet's work in the 1930s, he was at 'the nadir of his reputation among those starting to read poetry', not least because 'he was popular with antiquated persons like Mr. Oakley, who taught me Latin.'<sup>791</sup> Most of these critics go on to describe a particular moment of revelation where the poet's gifts are made clear – for Amis, it was the discovery of Tennyson's poem 'Milton', and for Motion a rare evening of reading poetry aloud, when a friend read 'Audley Court' and 'the scales fell from my eyes'.<sup>792</sup> Twentieth-century criticism and biographical discoveries meant that Terry Eagleton felt able to claim that 'if

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<sup>789</sup> Ibid.

<sup>790</sup> 'A Hundred Years After', *Times Literary Supplement* 4670, (2<sup>nd</sup> October 1992), pp. 8-9.

<sup>791</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>792</sup> Ibid.

Queen Victoria had appreciated the well-nigh psychotic disturbance which inhabits some of these poems, it is unlikely that they would have remained among her favourite bedside reading.<sup>793</sup> This is probably still the standard view of Tennyson in 2007 – that Eliot's 'very much more interesting and tragic Tennyson' was incapable of being fully understood by his Victorian peers.<sup>794</sup> Some critics, however, remained hostile to his work, most notably Tom Paulin, who saw the poet as 'the original National Heritage Poet', whose work epitomized 'all that is bogus, self-parodic, dishonest, false and dead-as-doornails in the culture.'<sup>795</sup> Paulin asks if 'Tennyson isn't in bulk just more or less pure kitsch?'<sup>796</sup> The poet reminds Paulin of 'a solemn Victorian statue of King Alfred which I once saw in a dreary market town somewhere in the South of England', thanks to his 'simple-minded patriotism, the deep racism, the professional *Angst* and gravid sonorous chill of the verse.'<sup>797</sup> This is some distance from the 'lordly line' of 'Alfred to Alfred' which Francis Turner Palgrave described.<sup>798</sup> Paulin thinks that Christina Rossetti, Clough, Browning and Hopkins are 'much more gifted poets.'<sup>799</sup> He admits that this stems from an 'early exposure to sprung rhythm', manifested in the work of Hopkins of which he remains a vociferous champion, and thus, in a sense, Paulin continues to manifest a childhood antipathy to the poet which both Motion and Amis describe leaving behind.<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>793</sup> Ibid.

<sup>794</sup> T. S. Eliot, 'Introduction', pp. xv-xvi.

<sup>795</sup> 'A Hundred Years After', *Times Literary Supplement* 4670, (2<sup>nd</sup> October 1992), p. 8.

<sup>796</sup> Ibid.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid.

<sup>798</sup> Francis Turner Palgrave, 'In Pace', *The Nineteenth Century* 32.189 (November 1892) pp.836-

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<sup>799</sup> 'A Hundred Years After', *Times Literary Supplement* 4670, (2<sup>nd</sup> October 1992), p. 8.

<sup>800</sup> Ibid.

Several biographies were produced to coincide with the anniversary, including *Tennyson* by Michael Thorn, which is generally regarded as unscholarly, and adds little of real interest about the poet. Tellingly, no biography of the poet has appeared since with the exception of Peter Levi's rather more conventional *Tennyson* in the same year and Leonée Ormond's brief *Alfred Tennyson: A Literary Life* in 1993. The most important biographical work to appear on the poet since Robert Bernard Martin's book is Ann Thwaite's 1996 *Emily Tennyson: The Poet's Wife*, a magisterial account that rescues its subject from obscurity.

Perhaps motivated in part by the reaction to Tennyson's centenary and the increase in interest in his family life, in the same year the comic novelist and broadcaster Lynne Truss published a comic biographical novel about the poet, *Tennyson's Gift*, set at Freshwater in 1864. Although much of the humour is similar to that of Virginia Woolf's earlier play *Freshwater*, and the characters are still obviously caricatures, Truss's novel is more expansive in its themes (it also features Lewis Carroll and an American phrenologist), and it is not as one-dimensionally critical towards the older Victorians, envisaging, for example, a keen interest in sex on the part of the Laureate. The shift from the open mockery of *Freshwater* to the rather more accommodating humour of *Tennyson's Gift* is testament to the renaissance in Tennyson's fortunes in the second half of the twentieth century, and it has been accompanied by several works of fiction which are explicitly inspired by Tennyson, the most famous of which are Michel Faber's historical novel *The Crimson Petal and the White* (2002) and A. S. Byatt's *Possession* (1990).

In 2007, Tennyson's words also remain present in the most unlikely of places – on the tables of cafés and restaurants as well as in homes across the world. In his recently published history of his family's business, Rich Cohen discusses how a globally successful American sugar substitute came to be named after a Tennyson poem. Marvin Eisenstadt, son of the inventor, Ben, claims that the name of the product he patented in 1957, 'Sweet 'N Low', was 'a phrase from his [Ben's] favourite Tennyson poem.'<sup>801</sup> Rich Cohen reveals, in typically blunt fashion, that this is 'not exactly true', and is an effort 'to class up the joint.'<sup>802</sup> In reality the product was named after one of Ben's favourite songs, 'written with the words of the poem [...] that had been a hit in the early 1900s, when Ben was a kid.'<sup>803</sup> The arrangement Cohen specifies is composed by Sir Joseph Barnby; it apparently played on the telephone when one was put on hold at Marvin Eisenstadt's home. The product remains an international brand; in 2003 Sweet 'N Low was still the market leader, at least in terms of volume, of all the sugar substitutes in the USA.<sup>804</sup> In a review of Cohen's book, J. Robert Lennon noted that the product is now used by the 'same people who still wear fedoras, or drive Buicks, or voted for Ross Perot' – it is 'is forever associated with the past'.<sup>805</sup> As this thesis has tried to suggest, Tennyson's afterlife is going strong, and the product was associated with the past – the literary past – from the moment it was named.

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<sup>801</sup> Rich Cohen, *Sweet and Low: A Family Story* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006), p. 101.

<sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.101-102.

<sup>803</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 102.

<sup>804</sup> Figures from *ibid.*, p. 226.

<sup>805</sup> J. Robert Lennon, 'Tastes like Cancer', *London Review of Books* 29.5 (8<sup>th</sup> March 2007), p.41.

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## Appendix

### Tennyson in Poetry Anthologies 1892-1950

This is a database of Tennyson poems appearing in anthologies of poetry between 1892 and 1950, accompanied by a database of the average percentage of pages occupied by Tennyson poems in anthologies which include his work. The primary catalogue used to find these anthologies was the electronic catalogue of the British Library; the inefficiency of which means that any such list is inevitably incomplete. Only anthologies of one volume were consulted, as those of more than one volume which I collected data from produced radically skewed results depending on the number of multi-volume anthologies there were for each decade; the exercise is designed to focus on Tennyson rather than the anthologies themselves. The bibliography only contains entries for books which were included in the database for ease of reference and statistical comparison.

The power of anthologies in shaping an audience's appreciation of a poet is significant. As Anne Ferry has shown, 'anthology pieces' like Arnold's 'Dover Beach' and Larkin's 'Church Going' have become examples of 'public poetry', which often overshadow the rest of a poet's *oeuvre*.<sup>806</sup> Ferry notes that it is for this reason that Robert Graves and Laura Riding wrote their *Pamphlet Against Anthologies* in 1928 – they did not want one poem canonised at the expense of the many others which are omitted and invariably neglected as a result.<sup>807</sup> With this in mind, it is fruitful to look at which of Tennyson's poems were included in anthologies – for example, which parts of *In Memoriam* were valued most highly

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<sup>806</sup> Anne Ferry, *Tradition and the Individual Poem* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001)

<sup>807</sup> See *ibid.*, p.128.

at different points in the twentieth century, whether his nationalist poems were preferred at times of national conflict, and ultimately which of his works were considered worthy of inclusion in poetry anthologies almost sixty years after his death.

Before examining the data closely, we must first acknowledge the limitations of this research. Many of the books consulted are anthologies designed for use in the schoolroom, or for a young audience. This might account for the prominence of poems with animals as their subject matter, for instance 'The Owl', 'Winter', and 'The Eagle', as well as lullabies such as 'Sweet and Low'. The classical subject matter of poems such as 'The Lotos-Eaters' and 'Ulysses' might well be a factor in their inclusion in anthologies for children, but it is less easy to explain the inclusion of many stanzas of *In Memoriam* in such collections other than by virtue of their quality or the perceived relevance of their 'message'. The research also includes data from several 'special interest' anthologies – for example, Owen Chalfant's 1949 volume entitled *The Daffodil*, or Stella Wolfe Murray's 1925 anthology *The Poetry of Flight*, which includes extracts from both 'Locksley Hall' and 'A Dream of Fair Women'. It must also be noted that the study does not take the popularity of anthologies into account. I have treated sections from *In Memoriam* as standalone poems, with the figures provided by decade for the poem as a whole; I have also treated lyrics from *The Princess* as individual poems. Extracts from all other poems, for example 'Maud' and 'Locksley Hall', are counted in the overall figure for each poem.

This leads me to discussion of the second database, which has information on the percentage of pages in anthologies which contain Tennyson

poems. The database was created to get a sense of the relative popularity of Tennyson, working on the assumption that more space devoted to Tennyson implies a higher regard for his work. In order to maintain the regularity of findings over the decades, I have not included anthologies which contain no work by Tennyson, neither have I consulted anthologies of more than one volume. Some entries can also be seen as 'outliers' because the criteria for inclusion means that very few of Tennyson's poems could be considered, such as *The Daffodil*. The anthology of which Tennyson makes up the largest percentage is W. J. Alexander's 1903 *A School Anthology of English Poetry*, almost 29% of which is by the poet.

The information for the 1890s is limited and it is hard to draw any conclusions from it – I have not been able to find many anthologies from the period, which I mainly attribute to the continued dominance of Francis Turner Palgrave's *Golden Treasury* at this time (on which Tennyson was a consultant). The 1910s data is also slightly misleading, as almost no anthologies were published after the outbreak of war in 1914, and many of those featured are overviews of the entire history of English poetry. Two of the very low readings for the 1910s are from 'specialist' anthologies concerning illness or the English experience of the Alps. The broadest pattern shows that the number of Tennyson's poems in anthologies decreases from the 1900s to 1950; however within this there is a rapid fall in the 1910s and a rise in the 1920s. What the overall picture does not show is that there were several Victorian-specific anthologies which appeared in the 1950s and 1960s; Tennyson is thus at once

removed from the 'modern' and promoted as an important 'Victorian', underlined by the increase in scholarly work on the poet in the same period.

*In Memoriam* – of which I have treated every section as a separate poem – is clearly the most popular poem in every decade. There is a predictable downturn in the fortunes of *Idylls of the King*, which is only featured once in the 1940s, although stand-alone early Arthurian poems like the 'Morte D'Arthur' and 'Sir Galahad' feature in a surprisingly universal fashion. Perhaps the most clearly popular anthology pieces, however, are the lyrics from *The Princess*, which is otherwise only featured once in any anthology. 'Sweet And Low' retains popularity through its being set to music and being used as a nursery rhyme in many children's anthologies. There is no clear pattern to the popularity of the most often-cited lyrics from *The Princess*. 'The splendour falls on castle walls' retains its popularity over the years, however 'Home they brought her warrior dead' decreases in frequency over time as 'Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white' is included more often.

The poems written after Tennyson was appointed Laureate dealing with 'public' themes, like 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', the 'Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington', and 'There is no land like England', are not only included in times of national crisis (although the latter was most popular in the 1940s). 'Locksley Hall' (albeit only really represented by the short section beginning 'For I dipt into the future') is also popular, and is even included in an *Anthology of Revolutionary Poetry* from 1929. Two poems indispensable to any reader of Tennyson today also proved unpopular in the period of the study – 'O that 'twere

possible' is only included four times, and the relatively low figure of 13 for 'The Lady of Shalott' is similarly surprising.

While any conclusion drawn from the results is obviously liable to a great deal of qualification, the database does provide a good insight into which Tennyson poems were popular at a particular time.

**Tennyson's Poetry in Anthologies 1892-1950**

	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	Total
A spirit haunts the year's last hours				2	1	1	4
Amphion		3					3
Anacaona						1	1
As through the land at eve we went		1	1	1	1	1	5
Ask me no more: the moon may draw the sea		1		2	1		4
Ballad of Oriana, The	1						1
Beggar Maid, The		1					1
Blackbird, The		2		1	1	1	5
Break, break, break	1	4	2	4	7	4	22
Brook, The	2	4	2	4	1	2	15
Charge of the Heavy Brigade, The				1			1
Charge of the Light Brigade, The		4		2	1		7
Circumstance		2					2
City Child, The					1		1
Cleopatra's Needle				1			1
Come down, O maid, from yonder mountain height		3			1		4
Come not, when I am dead				1	1		2
Crossing the Bar				2	2	6	10
Daisy, The		1	1			1	3
Day-Dream, The		1		1	1		3
Death of the Old Year, The		1		1			2
Deserted House, The				1			1
Dream of Fair Women, A		1		1	1		3
Dying Swan, The		2		1		1	4
Eagle, The			1	3	1	2	7
Early Spring (1883)		1					1
Edward Gray		2	1				3
Enoch Arden					1		1
Every day hath its night		1					1
Flower in the crannied wall				1		1	2
Frater Ave Atque Vale'						1	1
Goose, The		1					1
Guinevere		3	1				4
Helen's Tower						1	1
Hero to Leander				1			1
Higher Pantheism, The					2		2
Holy Grail, The			2				2
Home they brought her warrior dead		3	1	1			5
Idylls of the King ('Dedication')				1			1
In Memoriam							129
In The Valley of Cauntertz				2			2
Kraken, The						1	1
Lady Clara Vere de Vere		1					1
Lady Clare	1	2		1			4
Lady of Shalott, The		4	1	3	2	1	11
Locksley Hall		4	1	4	2	2	13
Lord of Burleigh, The		2					2
Lotos-Eaters, The (Full)		2		1		1	4
Lotos-Eaters, The (song)		4		1	4	4	13
Love thou thy land, with love far-brought		1	1				2
Mariana		2	1	2	2	1	8
Maud		5	2	2	6	5	20

May Queen, The		1					1
Mechanophilus						1	1
Merlin and the Gleam					1		1
Mermaid, The				1		1	2
Merman, The				1			1
Miller's Daughter, The		2	1			2	5
Milton: Alcaics				1		1	2
Minnie and Winnie				1			1
Morte D'Arthur		2	1	2	4	2	11
National Song (There is no land like England)					1	1	2
Northern Farmer, The (Old Style)						1	1
Now sleeps the crimson petal, now the white		1	1	2	4	2	10
O Beauty, passing Beauty! sweetest Sweet!				1			1
O Swallow, Swallow, flying, flying South				1			1
Oak, The					1	1	2
Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington		3	3	2	1	5	14
Of old sat Freedom on the heights		1					1
Oh! that 'twere possible		1		2		1	4
Oenone		2	1			1	4
Poet, The		1					1
Poet's Song, The					1		1
Princess, The (extracts, not songs)				1			1
Revenge, The						1	1
Roses on the Terrace, The						1	1
Sailor Boy, The					1		1
Sea-Fairies, The		3					3
Sir Galahad		1	2	2	1	2	9
Sir Launcelot and Queen Guinevere		1					1
Sisters, The		1					1
Song - The Owl		2		3	2	2	9
Specimen of a Translation of the Iliad in Blank Verse			1	1			2
St Agnes' Eve		1	4	1	1	2	10
Sweet and low, sweet and low		1	4	1	3	4	14
Tears, idle tears, I know not what they mean		2	3	1	6	4	16
The splendour falls on castle walls		1	6	2	7	9	29
Throstle, The						1	1
Thy voice is heard thro rolling drums			2	1		1	4
Tithonus		2	1		2	2	7
To E.L., on his Travels in Greece						1	1
To The Rev. F.D. Maurice				1		1	2
To Virgil					1	4	5
Two Voices, The		2					2
Ulysses		3		5	6	5	19
Vision of Sin, The				1		1	2
Voyage, The		1					1
What does little birdie say (from 'Sea-Dreams')		1		1	1		3
Will				1			1
Will Waterproof's Lyrical Monologue						1	1
Winter				1	2		3
You ask me, why, though ill at ease		1		1			2
Total:		9	118	38	93	91	567
No. of Anthologies Consulted which include Tennyson:		2	12	7	17	18	78

# In Memoriam Sections - First Line

	1890s	1900s	1910s	1920s	1930s	1940s	Total
Again at Christmas did we weave (LXXVII)				1			1
As sometimes in a dead man's face (LXXIV)						1	1
Be near me, when my light is low (L)			1	1		1	3
By night we lingered on the lawn (XCV)				3	1		4
Calm is the morn without a sound (XI)		3		2	2	2	9
Contemplate all this work of Time (CXVIII)		1			1		2
Dark House, by which once more I stand (VII)						1	1
Dear friend, far off, my lost desire (CXXIX)				1	1		2
Dip down upon the northern shore (LXXXIII)		1		2			3
Dost thou look back on what hath been (LXIV)		1		1			2
Fair ship, that from the Italian shore (IX)		1		1			2
Her eyes are homes of silent prayer (XXXII)		1					1
How fares it with the happy dead? (XLIV)		1					1
I climb the hill: from end to end (C)							0
I envy not in any moods (XXVII)		1		1		1	3
I hear the noise about thy keel (X)		1		1			2
I held it truth, with him who sings (I)		1	1				2
I past beside the reverend walls (LXXXVII)				2			2
I wage not any feud with Death (LXXXII)						1	1
If one should bring me this report (XIV)						1	1
Love is and was my Lord and King (CXXVI)		1		1	1	1	4
My own dim life should teach me this (XXXIV)				1			1
Now fades the last long streak of snow (CXV)		4		2	2	3	11
Now, sometimes in my sorrow shut (XXIII)		1					1
O Living will that shalt endure (CXXXI)		1					1
Oh yet we trust that somehow good (LIV)		2	1	2		3	8
Old Yew, which graspest at the stones (II)		1		1		1	3
One writes that 'Other friends remain' (VI)			1	1			2
Peace; come away: the song of woe (LVII)				1			1
Ring out, wild bells, to the wild sky (CVI)		5		3	4	3	15
So careful of the type?' But no (LVI)		1			1	1	3
Still onward winds the dreary way (XXVI)				1			1
Strong Son of God, immortal Love (Prologue)			2		1		3
Sweet after showers, ambrosial air (LXXXVI)		1		1			2
The churl in spirit, up or down (CXI)				1			1
The Danube to the Severn gave (XIX)			1	1			2
The path by which we twain did go (XXII)		1		1			2
The time draws near the birth of Christ (CIV)		1		1			2
The time draws near the birth of Christ (XXVIII)				1		1	2
The wish, that of the living whole (LV)		2				1	3
There rolls the deep where grew the tree (CXXIII)		1			1	1	3
This truth came borne with bier and pall (LXXXV)				1			1
Thou comest, much wept for; such a breeze (XVII)		1					1
Thy voice is on the rolling air (CXXX)				1	1		2
Tonight the winds begin to rise (XV)		2			1		3
Unwatched, the garden bough shall sway (CI)		2			1	1	4
When Lazarus left his charnel-cave (XXXI)		1					1
Who loves not Knowledge? Who shall rail (CXIV)		1					1
Witch-elms that counterchange the floor (LXXXIX)				1			1
With weary steps I loiter on (XXXVIII)				1			1
Total:	0	41	7	39	18	24	129
No. of Anthologies Consulted which include Tennyson:	2	12	7	17	18	22	78



**The Inclusion of Tennyson's Poems in Anthologies: Spreadsheet of Relative Percentages**

**Total No. of Pages    Pages which include a poem by Tennyson    Percentage**

**1890s**

244	14	5.737704918
308	5	1.623376623
Average:		3.680540771

**1900s**

1084	28	2.58302583
201	58	28.85572139
848	39	4.599056604
446	37	8.295964126
333	3	0.900900901
303	20	6.600660066
82	12	14.63414634
63	6	9.523809524
259	2	0.772200772
391	15	3.836317136
215	23	10.69767442
Average:		8.299952465

**1910s**

471	14	2.972399151
295	14	4.745762712
160	5	3.125
1023	36	3.519061584
402	7	1.741293532
192	3	1.5625
294	3	1.020408163
Average:		2.669489306

**1920s**

Total No. of Pages	Pages which include a poem by Tennyson	Percentage
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346	15	4.335260116
160	8	5
298	24	8.053691275
82	2	2.43902439
698	8	1.146131805
241	20	8.298755187
128	13	10.15625
123	4	3.25203252
272	17	6.25
288	24	8.333333333
234	11	4.700854701
192	14	7.291666667
256	21	8.203125
144	2	1.388888889
169	6	3.550295858
256	3	1.171875
288	6	2.083333333
353	3	0.849858357
Average:		4.805798691

**1930s**

448	14	3.125
928	38	4.094827586
287	10	3.484320557
127	7	5.511811024
311	6	1.92926045
416	17	4.086538462
404	6	1.485148515
123	8	6.504065041
254	11	4.330708661
199	6	3.015075377
98	5	5.102040816
352	15	4.261363636
217	4	1.843317972
306	7	2.287581699
478	7	1.464435146
264	17	6.439393939
413	11	2.663438257
Average:		3.625195714

**1940s**      **Total No. of Pages    Pages which include a poem by Tennyson    Percentage**

248	7	2.822580645
142	4	2.816901408
188	15	7.978723404
88	2	2.272727273
289	3	1.038062284
189	2	1.058201058
94	3	3.191489362
338	11	3.25443787
96	7	7.291666667
360	10	2.777777778
565	5	0.884955752
32	2	6.25
79	2	2.53164557
816	53	6.495098039
434	2	0.460829493
366	3	0.819672131
304	7	2.302631579
708	26	3.672316384
119	1	0.840336134
152	9	5.921052632
321	22	6.853582555
287	16	5.574912892
Average:		3.50498186

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